



THE
HISTORY
OF
Miss SOPHIA FANBROOK.
VOL. III.





T H E
C O N F L I C T :

O R, T H E
H I S T O R Y

O F
Mifs SOPHIA FANBROOK.

I N T H R E E V O L U M E S.

V O L. I I I.

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T H E
H I S T O R Y
O F
Miss SOPHIA FANBROOK.

B O O K VII.

THE painter, who chose rather to copy the picture of Sophia at his own house, endeavoured to prevail on Sir William to let him carry it to town : but the bare mention of such a request made him rave like a madman. ‘ Do you want to deprive me of the only comfort I have left ?

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B

‘ No,

‘ No, I will die, before I will lose
‘ sight of it but for a moment.’ The
artist, finding his persuasions had no
effect, complied, as Sir William offered
him his own price; and was pretty
closely attended by him, but was not
lucky enough to answer his expectations.
He made as many objections to it as he
had done to Mrs. Romney’s letter; and
it underwent many alterations. Some-
times the eyes were not vivid enough,
sometimes they wanted the languishing
sweetness of the original. Now the
mouth was too large; now he would
have it drawn a little open, as if she
was speaking; at another time, not see-
ing the graces which he had observed
in his Sophia whenever she spoke or
smiled, he would have it closed again.
There was, in short, no end to his fan-
cies, and the painter was heartily sick of
the task which he had undertaken, be-
fore he could obtain his dismissal.

While Sir William was thus fixing
the idea of his Sophia more firmly in
his mind, Mrs. Romney, after having,
agreeably

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agreeably to Sir William's directions, wrote and altered her letter about a dozen times, dispatched it to Sophia, who received it on the morning appointed for her marriage, just as she was preparing to accompany Mr. Beecher to church. She but too plainly read the discomposed state of Sir William's mind in it, and dropped a few tears of recollection. But at the approach of her lover, who came to see if she was ready, and at the endearing eagerness he expressed to be united to her, she recovered herself. He did not appear, in the least, curious to see what he thought she might perhaps wish to conceal, but she immediately gave the letter to him, with a sigh which she could not stifle. Supremely happy as he was going to be at that moment, he could not look over it without feeling all the tenderness of pity for his rival; to which the sight of his Sophia, dressed in the purest white, and adorned with the genuine charms of innocence, not a little contributed. Giving back the letter to his lovely bride, with a look easily to be

B 2 imagined,

imagined, but not to be described,
‘ Who can behold, said he, my charming
‘ angel, and not shed a sympathizing
‘ tear for the man who thus
‘ pathetically laments the loss of her?’

The entrance of Mr. Besfield prevented a reply in words, but the softest smile of complacency brightened the features of Sophia; and they proceeded to the performance of the ceremony, by which the hopes of Sir William were at once entirely cut off.

After a dinner provided for the occasion at Mr. Besfield’s, that gentleman set out in one post-chaise, and the new married pair in another, for Rose-Hill, where they arrived about sun-set. Mrs. Besfield and Juliet had been invited for a week or two, but declined the invitation for a time. Mr. Besfield knew his house could not be much in order for company, as he had been so long absent from it.

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In a day or two after Sophia got home, she wrote another letter to Mrs. Romney, wherein she only mentioned her marriage, by giving her a most friendly invitation to Rose-Hill, whenever she could leave Sir William; but enlarged so much on the necessity of her tender care, and kind attendance till he was well, that Sir William, seizing the letter, as he had done the former one, was ready to devour it. But when he saw SOPHIA BEECHER at the bottom, it dropped from his hand, and he sunk back in his chair, unable to speak a syllable.

Mrs. Romney, ever vigilant about him, began to talk of indifferent things, hoping thereby to turn his thoughts into a new channel; but she talked to no purpose. He sat awhile, insensible to all she said: then laying down his head on a table which stood near him, he gave a full vent to his feelings, which he could no longer conceal.

Before he had recovered himself, the picture of Sophia, for which he sent John, constantly, every day, was brought to him. He seized it eagerly, then found a thousand faults in it, and then, pressing it to his lips, called it his dear Sophia.

Turning about in a great hurry to Mrs. Romney, ‘Pray, madam, said he, let me have a piece of ribbon; to that I will tie it, and wear it next to my heart.’

‘My dear Sir William,’ replied Mrs. Romney, smiling in spite of the compassion which she felt for him, ‘don’t be absolutely ridiculous.’

As soon as she had uttered the last word, she thought she had gone too far, and wished to recal it, as it seemed to give Sir William great offence.

‘Ridiculous, madam,’ said he, with a contemptuous air; ‘I am somewhat at a loss to comprehend your meaning
‘by

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‘ by that expression; if to admire, to
‘ adore the most amiable, most deserving
‘ woman in the world, is to be ridicu-
‘ lous (laying a particular emphasis on
‘ this word) I truly deserve that epithet,
‘ and desire to enjoy it as long as I
‘ live.’

Mrs. Romney made no reply at that time: she saw he could not bear the slightest breath of opposition, and therefore went to her chamber, and soon returned to him with a piece of black ribbon. Without once troubling his head whether she laughed at him or no, he fixed the picture to it, and fastened it round his neck, so as to let it hang upon his breast. He then pressed his aunt to write to Mrs. Beecher, and begged she would wish her all happiness. ‘ I will write a line to her myself,’ said he. But he was soon dissuaded from that design.

After it had undergone many alterations, the letter was folded up, and then Mrs. Romney added a word or two,

unknown to her nephew ; but took particular care to say nothing about the picture, as she did not think proper to expose what she thought his greatest weakness.

Sir William rested very ill that night, and when his aunt enquired after his health in the morning, he, instead of answering her question, began to talk of Rose-Hill, told her that there was not a more pleasant place in the world, and that he knew it would be agreeable to Sophia's taste. ' You must go and see ' them, madam, said he.'

' Ay, Sir William, Mrs. Romney replied, when you are better.'

' I am tired of Windsor, cried he, ' quite tired. I have been thinking, ' that if I can get a house about four ' or five miles from Mr. Beecher's, I ' will go and live there. Don't mistake ' me, madam,' continued he, seeing his aunt discover some surprize at this proposal, ' I don't mean to see Sophia; ' no,

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‘ no, I never will see her, while she is
‘ his wife, I give you my word and
‘ honour. But I hope I may live in
‘ the same county, and breathe the
‘ same air with my Sophia. My spirits
‘ and my appetite will be thereby soon
‘ restored. But then you must promise
‘ to go with me, to live with me. It
‘ shall be your house, madam; I know
‘ you have friendship enough for me
‘ to comply with this request, and we
‘ will, with your consent, set about it
‘ to-morrow.

Sir William was so transported with the thoughts of being near Sophia, that they engrossed his attention during the remainder of the day. He was remarkably calm, and talked more to Dr. Wile, who called on him in a friendly manner, than he had done since the departure of Mrs. Beecher. He acquainted the doctor with his design, who replied, ‘ You cannot, I think, do
‘ better; not only Rose-Hill is an agree-
‘ able spot, but all the environs are ex-
‘ tremely pleasant: there is not, I be-
lieve,

‘ lieve, a more wholesome air in England.’

When Mrs. Romney went down stairs with the doctor, she seriously asked his opinion of this new flight of Sir William’s, and he advised her, by all means, to give way to it. ‘ The very riding about, madam, said he, in search of a house, will be of infinite service to him; the air, the exercise, and the having something in pursuit will employ his mind. If he does not meet with a house to suit him, the disappointment will not be very great; and if he does, he may, before he goes to settle there, be perhaps almost cured, if not perfectly so.’

Mrs. Romney’s opinion falling in with that of the doctor’s in regard to Sir William, she hastened, though she had no desire to change her habitation, to pursue the plan which he had projected, and on the very next day they set out in his post-chariot and four for —shire.

While

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While Sir William, instead of endeavouring to extinguish his passion for Sophia, was adding, undesignedly, new fuel to it; she spent her time very agreeably, in regulating her domestic affairs, and assisting her dear Mr. Beecher to make their house as comfortable to themselves as possible. It was of a proper size for a middling family, most delightfully situated, at a very convenient distance from the public road, so as neither to be troubled with dust in summer, nor to be too lonely in winter. It was but low-ceiled, but very commodious. The front, and the side next to the garden, were covered with jasmynes and honeysuckles, which not only perfumed the air with their fragrance, but gave a very rural appearance to the building which they adorned. By her extreme neatness and elegant taste, Sophia had gracefully thrown so much rustic simplicity through the apartments within, that they not only gave her Beecher a great deal of pleasure, but every body who saw them; so that soon after her arrival,

their habitation was generally called The Charming Cottage, and distinguished by that name among their neighbours from the larger, but far less pleasing dwellings which surrounded them. Their garden was roomy enough for them; exceedingly pleasant, as it opened at the bottom, over a thick quick-set hedge, into a very delightful country. As they kept only two maids and a man, Beecher himself was often gardener, and in that character found himself most agreeably assisted by his dear Sophia, as far as her sex and strength would permit, who became immoderately fond of such wholesome amusements as her rural life afforded. They had now and then a neighbouring visit to pay and receive; but as they both felt themselves more happy at home than abroad, the compliments which they received were so slowly returned by them, that their acquaintance could not be in the least troublesome to them; and Beecher entirely broke off all connections with Mr. Ransom, because he thought he had ended

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deavoured to prevent his union with Sophia.

Mr. and Mrs. Besfield, and Miss West, came down and stayed a few weeks with them: then indeed, to entertain them, they went a little about the country; but as soon as they were left to themselves, they returned to their rural employments with redoubled alacrity.

During all this time Mrs. Romney and Sophia kept up a correspondence; but the former took care not to mention her frequent and near approaches to Rose-Hill, for fear the latter should charge her with unkindness, for not calling upon her in her excursions. Mrs. Romney only mentioned Sir William's constant airings, which she told her were, she thought, of service to him. Mrs. Beecher was always glad to hear that Sir William had received any benefit from his rides, and never omitted to express the sincerest satisfaction which she

she felt upon that occasion, in the most animated terms.

‘ Ah!’ cried Sir William sighing, whenever his aunt communicated her letters to him, ‘ she does not know how eager I have been in search of a house near her. Perhaps, when she hears of my design, she may disapprove of it. I hope she will not, for I would rather die than displease her. And yet, I think, if I know her heart, she will not be offended with me, for trying to make that life comfortable which she seemed so desirous to preserve.’

In his excursions with Mrs. Romney, Sir William saw a house, three miles nearer London than Mr. Beecher’s, which very much pleased him; and finding that his aunt discovered no dislike to it, ‘ I think, madam, said he, that this house will do; if you have no objection, I will purchase it for you, and become your boarder for a while.’

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As he smiled a little when he made this proposal, which she had not seen him do for a long time, she could not bring herself to thwart him, though moving was not at all agreeable to her, at her advanced age, especially from a place where she had a few sociable acquaintance suitable to her taste. She looked upon Sir William's life to be in a precarious state, and his inclinations to be still more uncertain. By being still so excessively attached to a woman whom he had loved well enough to resign to another, he had given, in her opinion, such an astonishing proof of the violence of his passion, that she thought him, under the influence of such an attachment, capable of any thing, and did not, therefore, know what new thoughts, new flights, it might inspire. He might, she apprehended, see another woman, and grow as fond of her; and she really wished him to be fixed by a new object, though she should be perhaps again obliged to change her situation. Any change in that, however, she was willing to endure, if she could

thereby, in any shape, contribute to the happiness of a relation so dear to her, and to whom she was now, through the means of her young friend, under great obligations. But in thinking that Sir William might be under the power of mutability, she wronged him. His love for Sophia was not founded on caprice. He was not enslaved by her personal beauties, though powerfully attracted by them. He was a man of too much delicacy, and too nice an observer of the sex, to be allured by them alone. Her exalted mind, her conversable talents, her noble way of thinking, her modesty, her diffidence, the elegant simplicity of her taste, and the extensive benevolence of her heart, these were the captivating charms which thoroughly fixed his affection for her, which strongly recommended her to his esteem, and which rendered him totally incapable of having the least relish for any other woman.

Sir William purchased the house immediately, and it was with all possible expedition

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expedition prepared for their reception : but before he removed to it, he desired his aunt to inform Mrs. Beecher of what he had done, and to intreat her not to be offended with him for wishing to be near her, as he never intended to come in her way. ‘ You may tell ‘ Beecher, said he, that I dare not trust ‘ myself with a view of her.’

He was so restless for fear Sophia should not approve of what he had done, that he would have wrote a line to her himself, if Mrs. Romney had not persuaded him to drop that design. ‘ You are, I believe madam, in the ‘ right, said he ; but I only intended to ‘ ask her forgiveness. I never can support her anger ; if she must not love ‘ me, she is not obliged to hate me. ‘ Surely I may endeavour to prevent ‘ her hatred.’

Mrs. Romney only replied with a smile, and in a postscript to her letter added, ‘ Sir William longs to write a ‘ line to you, but I won’t let him.’

Beecher,

Beecher, to whom Sophia gave all Mrs. Romney's letters before she broke the seals, and insisted upon his reading them first, laughed heartily, and said, 'Positively, my dear Sophy, I will answer this letter.' 'There, take the pen then, said she smiling.' 'No, my dear, replied he, I had forgot, you must tell Sir William that you are not angry with him; and pray join with me in giving an invitation to your good friend Mrs. Romney, to come and see us when she is our neighbour.'

Sophia smiled, and wrote just what he dictated, while he fondly hung over her. When she had assured Mrs. Romney how much joy she felt at her coming to live near her, she desired her to tell Sir William, that she hoped he would find the environs of Rose-Hill more efficacious towards restoring his health than Windsor had been, and finished by saying, 'Mr. Beecher will write a line to my dear Mrs. Romney, and I cannot hinder him.' This addition

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addition of Beecher's was nothing more than a warm renewal of his wife's invitations to Mrs. Romney, and a few lively expressions with regard to his Sophia, who was, he said, unfortunately for him, so enchanting a little angel, as to prevent him from having a communication with so amiable a neighbour as Sir William.

This letter gave Sir William the highest satisfaction which he had felt from the day of Sophia's marriage, because it assured him that neither she nor Beecher disapproved of his approaching proximity to them; a satisfaction which he had been almost afraid to expect. He was also very much pleased with Beecher's behaviour to him, and the manner in which he spoke of his Sophia. Snatching up the letter on a sudden, fetching a deep sigh, and letting it fall from his hand, ' Ah, cried he, her happy husband
' need not be under any apprehensions
' about me, while he is so beloved by
' that angelic creature—No, no, he is
' sure

‘ sure of her heart; he has no reason to
‘ be alarmed.’

‘ Bless me, Sir William, said Mrs.
‘ Romney, you would not surely wish
‘ Mrs. Beecher to be insensible to the
‘ merit of her husband? She ought to
‘ love him.’

‘ I know not, cried he peevishly, what
‘ I would wish; but there is no occa-
‘ sion for her to pay him such implicit
‘ obedience. Ah, Sophia! that was
‘ what I never could have expected
‘ from thee! Had I been so blest in
‘ the possession of thee as the most
‘ happy Beecher is, thou wouldst have
‘ been the entire mistress of my soul.’

Mrs. Romney, to divert him from
these disagreeable reflections, asked him
some necessary questions about their re-
moval, and in a very short time after-
wards they were settled at Bellgrove;
that was the name of the house which
Sir William had purchased.

‘ Now, my dear aunt, said he, you
‘ shall go and see your dear amiable So-
‘ phia;

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‘ phia; my chariot shall carry you, and
‘ bring you back in the evening, for I
‘ cannot spare you yet for the whole
‘ night. Besides, I shall be quite impa-
‘ tient to hear how she looks, and how
‘ she receives you. Be sure to invite her
‘ and Beecher to come and dine with you;
‘ but desire them to let you know the
‘ day before, that I may for that day
‘ retire to Mount-Acres. I can easily
‘ roll thither and back again with a set
‘ of horses.’

‘ I wonder, Sir William, said Mrs.
‘ Romney, that you don’t go to Mount
‘ Acres, and stay there for some time;
‘ you ought to look after Sophia’s pen-
‘ sioners, they will miss her.’

She said this with a design to excite
him to look after his estate there, but
her words had not the desired effect.
‘ Miss her! cried he; every creature who
‘ saw her must miss her; and I am
‘ well convinced that I should feel her
‘ absence more strongly there than any
‘ where, except at Windsor. No, ma-
‘ dam,

‘ dam, I cannot bear to recollect the
‘ happy moments, hours, days, which
‘ I spent there with that lovely angel.
‘ But then to have the objects of her
‘ compassion taken care of, will be act-
‘ ing every way agreeable to her wishes,
‘ I am certain.’

Mrs. Romney was a little afraid at first to leave him to himself; but as he pressed her so much to make her visit to Rose-Hill, and appeared to be better than he had for some time been, she consented, as she very much longed to see Sophia, whom, in spite of the affliction which she had felt on her account, she still most affectionately regarded.

When she arrived, Mrs. Beecher was in the garden with her husband, helping him to tie up some flowers, which the wind had injured; but the moment they told her that Mrs. Romney was at the door, she flew to her, and welcomed her with the sincerest joy. Mrs. Romney was equally eager to express her satisfaction

tisfaction at this revival of their friendship, but was particularly pleased that Sir William had resolution enough to refrain from seeing her, as her person never had appeared to her so engaging.

The tranquility indeed of Sophia's mind, since her marriage with Beecher, had so thoroughly contributed to the re-establishment of her health; and the morning breezes, together with her little manual operations in the garden, had added such an unusual freshness to her complexion, that Mrs. Romney, who till now had only thought her agreeable, began to look upon her as really beautiful in her person; so much does corporeal health promote mental peace, and improve all exterior charms.

Mr. Beecher, whose whole delight was in making his lovely wife happy, received Mrs. Romney in a manner particularly agreeable to her: as he looked upon her as the sincere friend of his Sophia, and the aunt of an amiable man, who still loved her with ardour
enough

enough to be wretched without her, he treated her with all possible deference and attention.

The day was spent by Mrs. Romney much to her satisfaction: she admired all Sophia's little ingenious contrivances to make her habitation both neat and genteel; her nice management of her poultry, which she always superintended herself, and indeed made her particular care; and their mutual taste in the cultivation of their garden, which contained nothing very expensive, but every thing useful and agreeable.

As a great part of their conversation naturally turned upon Sir William, Sophia declared how much she was pleased to hear of his growing better, and desired Mrs. Romney to tell him, that she thought herself much obliged to him for bringing her dear friend so near her: but Beecher, who, from what Sophia had communicated, had conceived a very advantageous opinion of him, said a thousand handsome things of him, and added,

added, that nothing but the happiness which he enjoyed with his Sophia, prevented him from regretting the loss of his acquaintance.

Mrs. Romney, before she left them, exactly obeyed her nephew's injunctions, and pressed Sophia to return her visit upon the terms he had mentioned: but Beecher said he could not think of forcing Sir William out of her house on their account, though but for a few hours. 'And as the sight of a man who had robbed him of all his happiness cannot be agreeable to him, at least till he is more reconciled to the loss of this amiable girl,' continued he, smiling affectionately on his wife, I hope, madam, you will excuse this piece of respect in us, and favour us with your company as often as you can.'

As Sophia joined with her Beecher on this occasion, in the most bewitching manner imaginable, Mrs. Romney, who thought that they judged very properly, promised to be with them

as often as her nephew could spare her.

When she returned to Bellgrove, she found Sir William waiting for her at the entrance of the parlour.

‘ Come in, my dear aunt, cried he
‘ eagerly, come in. I have been long
‘ wishing for you, but I suppose you
‘ could not prevail on yourself to leave
‘ your dear Sophia. Tell me, in the
‘ first place, is she well? is she happy?
‘ I know she must be happy, that is an
‘ idle question. How does she look?
‘ what did she say?’

‘ My dear Sir William, she replied,
‘ do you expect me to answer all these
‘ questions at once?’

She then told him how agreeable her visit had been, and acquainted him with every particular which she thought would amuse him, but prudently forbore to mention the advantageous alteration in her person, imagining that she should

should thereby only make him still more regret the loss of her. But Sir William was not satisfied with her barely saying that Mrs. Beecher looked well; he had entertained a notion that she did not, and that his aunt had deceived him. She was therefore obliged to confess that she never appeared so lovely.

‘ Did she, sweet girl?’ cried he languishingly, ‘ I always thought her person most extravagantly pleasing.’ Then after a little pause—‘ She is happy,’ continued he, dear creature, and I have at least the transporting satisfaction to know that I have contributed to her being so. May you ever enjoy the greatest felicity, still beloved, still ‘ esteemed Sophia’— looking earnestly on the miniature of her which he took out of his bosom, the sight of which always made Mrs. Romney very uneasy, because she thought his behaviour in this respect beneath a man of his understanding and good sense—But where is the man who consults his understanding, when his heart is under the dominion of

one powerful passion, which swallows up all the rest? It was, however, by the force of this passion alone, when properly conducted, that Sir William became a worthy being, and an useful member of society.

As Mrs. Romney, therefore, could not endure the sight of the above mentioned miniature, because it gave her so disagreeable a proof of her nephew's weakness, she endeavoured to divert his attention from it, by talking about Beecher, on whom she lavished a great many praises, saying, that she thought him both a handsome man, and a very pretty gentleman.

Sir William sighed at the word handsome, imagining that it was Beecher's person alone which had engaged Sophia's inclinations. ' If that is the case, said he, I am afraid she stands but a poor chance to be happy—Dear girl! A man who has nothing but personal attractions to recommend him, cannot, I am sure, make a woman of her

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‘ her exquisite sensibility as perfectly
‘ happy as she deserves to be. But
‘ come, madam, describe his person, for
‘ at the time of his accident, my eyes
‘ were fixed on Sophia. I shall never
‘ forget the agony she was in, never.’

Mrs. Romney, to prevent him from reflecting on that melancholy scene, immediately stopped him by saying, ‘ Mr. Beecher is tall and well made, he has ‘ a fair complexion, a fresh colour, light ‘ hair, and bright blue eyes; his mouth ‘ is rather wideish, but his teeth are remarkably white and even; his air is ‘ very genteel; his countenance is open, ‘ manly, and ingenuous; he is mild in ‘ his manners, modest in his carriage, ‘ and by an agreeable diffidence in his ‘ aspect, prepossesses one at first sight in ‘ his favour. He seems to be, and is, ‘ I dare say, extremely good natured; his ‘ behaviour to his wife is affectionately ‘ tender.’

‘ With which,’ interrupted Sir William, heavily sighing, ‘ she is, no doubt, highly pleased.’

‘ She seems indeed to be so,’ replied Mrs. Romney.

‘ Ay,’ returned he, doubling his sighs, ‘ that mildness and that diffidence have warmed her heart to love. The violence of my raptures, which I could never keep within bounds, has undone me. Beecher’s tenderness touched her, while my passion deprived me of the power of pleasing; and yet, my dear madam, I certainly never wanted tenderness. How many times, when she looked and smiled ineffably alluring, has my whole soul been ready to dissolve before her? But he was the fortunate man, destined to inspire her with that love which she tried to give me, but tried in vain. How often have I seen her withdraw her lovely hand, and her enchanting person, from my fond embrace? and then, as if she pitied me, as if she
‘ thought

‘ thought that she had been too severe,
‘ too cold; how often has she kindly
‘ turned and given me that hand again?’

‘ Indeed, indeed, Sir William,’ said
Mrs. Romney, ‘ if you will thus con-
‘ tinue to torment yourself, I will not
‘ go to Mrs. Beecher again; or if I
‘ do, I will tell you nothing about her.’

‘ Well, madam,’ replied he hastily,
‘ I have done, I have done. But it is
‘ cruel to deprive me of the only con-
‘ solation left for me, the pleasure of
‘ talking about her. However, if you
‘ refuse to hear me, you cannot pre-
‘ vent my thinking of her. Thoughts
‘ are free, and mine are all engrossed
‘ by Sophia.’

Mrs. Romney left him to those
thoughts for a while, on purpose to put
a stop to the effusions of his heart, be-
cause she apprehended that they too
much affected him: but when she re-
turned, he resumed the old subject,
and for some time dwelt on it with a

painful satisfaction, and with great reluctance changed the conversation.

While Sir William was in this self-torturing situation, Mrs. Romney, at his earnest desire, and in order to enjoy the company of her dear Mrs. Beecher, went frequently to see her, and always found her delighted at the sight of her.

The winter now approached. Sophia, who began to discover some symptoms very agreeable to her affectionate husband, was by him intreated to keep a good deal within doors, for fear she should injure her health in the condition she was in. She, all compliance, submitted cheerfully to every thing he thought proper for her, and amused herself with her music; for, upon finding her taste in singing so much improved, and her finger on the harpsichord very masterly, he had purchased a very fine instrument for her. She sometimes also employed her pencil, while he read to her, when she had no needle-work that required her particular attention,

tention, for she was an excellent œconomist, she and her two maids doing all the sewing necessary in the family. She also, with the assistance of Mrs. Romney, who had had several children, but buried them all in their infancy, began to make preparations for the reception of the little stranger that was expected to make its appearance in the following summer.

As Mrs. Romney communicated these expectations to Sir William, because she knew they could not be long concealed; he was filled with a thousand apprehensions, lest any accident should happen to her, at a time so frequently fatal to her sex, and made his aunt often go to see her, who did not indeed want much intreaty; for as his confined way of living would not permit her to form any new connections, and as she was quite removed from all her old acquaintance, her time passed with a tiresome and melancholy sameness: so that, setting aside her extreme regard for Mrs. Beecher, she was always glad to go to

Rose-Hill, where her good friends often made her stay late, as she had always two of Sir William's men, after dark, on horseback, with moons, to attend her.

While Mrs. Romney amused herself in this manner, Sir William was sometimes visited by Dr. Wise, who came and spent the evening with him, and returned to his patients in the morning; and sometimes by Belmont, who hearing of the melancholy condition he was in, came twice or thrice during the winter, and spent several days with him.

As Belmont was, he knew, an admirer of Sophia, Sir William admitted him, but was denied to others of his acquaintance. Belmont, though a man of pleasure, was also a man of sensibility. He felt for his friend, and tried to comfort him. He was also a great lover of music, and used to touch the organ on which Sophia had so often charmed its enraptured master, who, on such occasions, never failed to throw out his transports on her vocal powers, which
were

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were so extravagant, that Belmont started up one night from the organ quite furious, and dashing down the music-book, cried, ‘Prithee, Acres, be quiet, ‘your transports are enough to distract ‘me. I have only one favour to thank ‘you for, that is, your kindness in never ‘letting her sing to me; for if she had ‘exerted all the powers of voice which ‘you say she is possessed of, by heaven, ‘I should have been as mad as yourself.’

In this manner these two families passed the winter, and a great part of the spring. When summer drew near, Beecher, who, as well as Sir William, began to be alarmed for Sophia, intreated Mrs. Romney to prevail on Sir William to suffer her to remain with his dear wife, till she recovered from an indisposition, with which, he said, he expected her, from probable conjectures, to be seized; especially, as her aunt Besfield would, it was most likely, be engaged at that time in town, preparing things for her eldest son, who was now

going into a merchant's house at Leghorn.

Mrs. Romney, with the greatest good humour, promised to stay with her dear friend a whole month. ' You need not fear, said she to Mr. Beecher, Sir William's opposition to this promise ; he will rather promote my residence with you, because he cannot be decently informed every moment how Mrs. Beecher does, except I am here to send him an account of her.'

According to Mrs. Romney's conjectures, Sir William was highly pleased with the thoughts of her being so long with Sophia, as he was assured that she would then want no care, no attendance proper for her situation.

The hour at length arrived, equally dreaded by Beecher and by Sir William; but their feelings at its arrival were very differently expressed. Beecher, near his amiable wife, strove, with the most

most sincere affection, to alleviate his uneasiness, and lessen his anxiety, for fear of disturbing and alarming her, while with uplifted eyes, he silently implored the protection of Providence. Sir William, at a distance, tormented with all the stings of anguish, and the horrors of suspense, gave a free vent to his apprehensions, and, on his knees, loudly supplicated heaven to spare the most lovely of women in the most trying situation. The prayers both of the husband and the lover were heard. After a very dangerous conflict, Sophia, recovering a little, presented to her fond husband a sweet boy.

As Sir William's servant continually went to Mr. Beecher's, with enquiries after Sophia's health, he soon received the pleasing news, and poured out his thanksgivings (and none ever flowed from a more grateful heart) as freely, as sincerely as he had offered up his petitions. Beecher was not less grateful to Providence, for the preservation of his dear wife, and her dear infant, than
Sir

Sir William, but expressed himself with much more composure.

Sophia soon quitted her chamber with her health restored; and as she had, before she was taken ill, intreated her husband to let her nurse her child herself, she set about this unfashionable task with the greatest satisfaction, and her dear boy soon became her chief care, and her principal delight.

When she was quite well, Mrs. Romney returned to Sir William, who, according to his usual manner of proceeding, asked her a million of questions, and found the greatest reason, from the answers he received, to admire still more and more Sophia's delicacy and tenderness, in performing at once the pleasing duties of mother and nurse to her little son.

As soon as it was proper for little Beecher to travel so far, Sir William desired Mrs. Romney to prevail on his parents to let him be brought to Bellgrove.

grove. This request they could by no means refuse. Mrs. Romney therefore went and fetched him, with his maid who attended him, and presented him to Sir William, who almost devoured the pretty creature with his caresses, as he fancied that he was the very picture of his mother: and he indeed grew afterwards into a strong resemblance of her, though the traces of similitude were at that tender age scarcely perceptible. But Sir William, from the warmth of his imagination, with the assistance of love, drew a likeness discoverable by nobody but himself.

Little Edward, for that was his name, after his father, throve apace, and did no small credit to his mother's assiduous care of him.

Mrs. Beecher, when her son was three months old, was called off from her attendance on him, by the illness of her dear husband, who was suddenly seized with a violent malignant fever, which, in spite of the quickest and best advice,
soon

soon discovered fatal prognostics. As the physicians gave her from the first but faint hopes, her anxiety and her distress were beyond description. She sent immediately to Mrs. Romney, who had been longer from her than usual.

Sir William, instead of forming hopes from the danger his rival was in, once more trembled for the life of Sophia, and begged his aunt to fly, with the utmost expedition, to the relief of all that was dear to him in this world.

When Mrs. Romney arrived, poor Beecher was very near his end. She found the wretched Sophia on her knees by his bed-side, holding him by one hand, which she watered with her tears; while the other was lifted up in fervent prayer for his recovery.

Beecher had been light-headed, but was now tolerably composed. Seeing Mrs. Romney enter, he made a motion for her to draw near.

‘ My

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‘ My dear friend,’ said he, with a low, faltering voice, ‘ the friend of my Sophia, hear me, I intreat you. Let me, while I thank you for all past favours, beseech you to use your utmost efforts to support my dear wife in the trial she has to go through. I have, I am sensible, but a very little while to live, and I know that she will scarce be able to sustain my loss—Do you then comfort her—Do not leave her. And now my dearest Sophia, continued he, pressing her hand with all the strength he had, hear me—Oh ! hear the last words of your Beecher—If ever he was dear to you, pay that regard to his memory which he desires, by complying with his dying request.’——

Here he paused a while, as if to collect all his feeble powers, and then proceeded.

‘ I must leave you, my beloved wife, in all the pride and bloom of youth, every way lovely, and therefore an object of desire. You may possibly,
‘ for

‘ for that reason, become a prey to a
‘ man who will not set the high value
‘ on you which I, who have tried your
‘ merit, am sure you deserve. Not that
‘ I believe, my Sophia, you will forget
‘ me soon; nor do I believe it will be
‘ in your power for a long time to yield
‘ yourself up to another. But we do
‘ not always know our own thoughts.
‘ You have an infant to bring up, and
‘ to educate, who, by losing a father
‘ so early in life, will consequently very
‘ early want both a father and a friend.
‘ But remember, my Sophia, my love
‘ remember, that whenever you are in-
‘ clined to change your condition, re-
‘ member, O! my dearest wife, that
‘ there is a man most worthy of you,
‘ to whom you are bound by the strictest
‘ ties of honour, and to whom you
‘ ought to be, when I am no more, by
‘ those of religion. Think, my dearest
‘ love, that in giving you up to my
‘ blest arms, he almost deprived him-
‘ self of life. Think, therefore, what
‘ you owe him—Sir William Acres still
‘ loves you tenderly—loves you too ten-
‘ derly

‘ derly to hurry you—he will, I know,
‘ wait your own time—he will be a fa-
‘ ther, to my---boy—he will, he will.’

Here he stopped. Sophia could only reply with her sobs and tears. Her voice was choaked whenever she attempted to answer him. He recovered himself just to thank her, in broken accents, for all her kindness and affection, and intreating her earnestly to preserve herself for her son’s sake, fell into a fainting fit, in which he soon after expired.

Poor Sophia was too much oppressed with her poignant grief, to hear the last sigh, and was at that moment sunk down by him, without sense or motion.

Mrs. Romney, who was shocked beyond measure at this most affecting scene, ordered her to be removed to another apartment, where she fell out of one fainting fit into another, till her life appeared to be in the utmost danger.

When

When she began to shew some small signs of life, Mrs. Romney, who sat by her bed-side, desired the servant to bring her little son to her. She pressed the sweet boy to her fond bosom with the most pathetic sorrow, and watered his innocent face with her tears. The sight of his helpless innocence had, however, the effect which Mrs. Romney wished for, intended, and expected. Observing her tenderness for her son, ‘ Turn your thoughts, my dear Mrs. Beecher, said she, from the dead, to whom you have performed every kind office, and every religious duty; turn your thoughts from him, who no longer wants your love, to this living object of your affection, who may perhaps follow his father, if you persist in not taking proper care of your own life, and in refusing comfort.’

‘ Do with me what you will,’ said Sophia, with a voice interrupted by the deepest sighs, ‘ I have lost all comfort in losing my dear Beecher: but whether I survive him or not, take care,
‘ Oh!

‘ Oh! take the greatest care of my
‘ lovely child; be you a mother to
‘ him.’

She could say no more; but relapsing into fainting fits, almost drove Mrs. Romney to distraction.

Sir William’s servant, who had waited till the evening was far advanced, to carry the news of Beecher’s death to his master, was detained to the very last moment by Mrs. Romney, that she might not at the same time shock him with Sophia’s danger. On her coming to herself a little, and lying quiet, she dispatched him.

When Sir William, almost frantic with impatience, before the arrival of his servant, was informed at once of Beecher’s death, and the dangerous situation of his dear Sophia: the agonies which he felt are not to be expressed; no words can paint the torments he endured.

‘ Must

‘ Must I then, said he, at last lose
‘ her for ever? Oh! gracious heaven!
‘ who knows the purity of my heart
‘ with regard to this amiable woman,
‘ give, give her to my fervent prayer;
‘ and if I am not deserving of such a
‘ blessing, spare her, O spare her, for
‘ the sake of her dear child, and make
‘ him not so early a helpless orphan!’

These were the humble petitions which Sir William, half distracted, offered up on his knees, while the tears of tenderness rolled down his cheeks during the greatest part of the night.

The servant, as soon as he had delivered his mournful message, was ordered back, to wait at Mrs. Beecher’s, and to bring him the earliest news about her in the morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Besfield, having received an express from Mrs. Romney, which acquainted them with the death of Mr. Beecher, and the deplorable condition of their niece, made all the
haste

haste they could to see her ; but she was unable to speak to them.

As Mr. Besfield's affairs required his speedy return to London, he, at the desire of Mrs. Romney, opened Mr. Beecher's will, wherein he found that he had left his wife executrix, and every thing during the minority of her son, to whom she was guardian, except a proper sum to be taken up for his education : that, in case of her death, Sir William Acres and Mr. Besfield were charged with that office ; and that if, during her life, she should at any time want their advice and assistance, these gentlemen were earnestly desired to afford them the best in their power ; and that, when her son came of age, three hundred a year should be set apart for him, and two hundred settled upon herself for life, with his house and all its furniture.

To this will, which was read to her by her uncle, Mrs. Beecher made no answer ; she sighed, but she could not speak.

‘speak. He then asked Mrs. Romney, after he had thanked her for the true regard which she had ever shewn for his niece, if it would not be proper to wait on Sir William.

‘ Undoubtedly, Sir, said Mrs. Romney, and I shall esteem your visit to him as a great act of kindness, for I believe he stands very much in need of consolation: but I hope you will not tell him that Mrs. Beecher is dangerously ill, because I am afraid that he will not have strength to bear so severe a blow; and I still flatter myself that I shall send him better news soon.’

Mr. Besfield promised to follow her directions, and immediately set out for Bellgrove, where he found Sir William in the greatest disorder of mind. He received him at once, as soon as he heard his name, but trembled all over in such a manner, that he could hardly keep himself upon his legs; for he feared that his

Sophia

Sophia was dead, and that her uncle came to tell him so.

Mr. Besfield saw with extreme concern the condition Sir William was in, and taking him by the hand, led him to a chair. When he had seated himself in another near him, he mentioned the death of Mr. Beecher, and spoke of him in very affectionate terms.

Sir William had not patience to hear him out, but interrupting him, cried, 'Is my Sophia alive?'

'She is, said Mr. Besfield, and I hope
'will live to return your uncommon re-
'gard for her.'

'Thank heaven! replied Sir Wil-
'liam, my prayers have been heard;
'let her but live, let her but be happy,
'and I shall be content, whatever be
'my fate.'

Mr. Besfield then produced the will.
Sir William, when he had looked it

over, was quite moved: he could not refrain from lamenting an amiable man, cut off in the prime of life, in the midst of all his joys; torn away from so lovely a wife, and so sweet a son, with whom, in all human probability, he might have been happy many years. He spoke of Beecher in the highest terms; said that he had done him honour, by mentioning him in his will; and promised to comply with the request in it relating to him.

‘ I should have received a great deal of pleasure, added he, in being personally acquainted with Mr. Beecher, but my untoward fate opposed my inclinations. As to Mrs. Beecher, I have still the tenderest, the truest regard for her, and I intreat you to let nothing be omitted, which may contribute to her comfort and relief.’

He then mentioned the great confidence he had ever placed in Dr. Wise, and told Mr. Besfield that he thought he had been of much service to his Sophia

phia in her late illness; and asked him if he imagined there would be any impropriety in his attendance on her then, and whether it would be disagreeable to her.

‘ I wish for nothing more, Sir William, said Mr. Besfield, than to have you satisfied with every step we take about our niece; but she is at present insensible to every thing, and therefore can make no objections to any body.’

This speech was a dagger to Sir William; he was dreadfully alarmed, and looked ready to expire with grief. He was for some time unable to speak: he sighed, he wept. ‘ Poor dear Sophia,’ cried he, after a long and mournful pause, how my heart bleeds for thee?’

Mr. Besfield told him that Mrs. Romney had still hopes of her, and begged him to give directions where doctor Wise lived, if he thought he could be

of any service to her, that he might be sent for without delay.

‘ I will write to him immediately,’
‘ replied Sir William ; my letter may
‘ perhaps hasten him. Pray heaven his
‘ assistance may be of service to this dear
‘ amiable woman.’

Sir William’s note was penned in such a manner, that if the doctor had not a sincere regard for him, it would have brought him with all possible expedition. As he generally resided a few miles from Windsor, he was not far distant from Mrs. Beecher’s house, and therefore very soon made his appearance there.

When Sir William had dispatched his man and horse to the doctor, Mr. Besfield took his leave. Though he had a great respect for that gentleman, as he was so nearly related to his Sophie, and wished to detain him, he found himself so incapable of conversing, that he suffered

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ferred him to depart, after having given him a general invitation to his house.

When Mr. Besfield was gone, Sir William gave a loose to his sorrow, which was so violent that it almost deprived him of his reason. He felt his sorrow more severely by the absence of Mrs. Romney, whose friendly conversation would have greatly relieved him; and he had no other friend to whom he could open his heart with equal unreserve.

After a tedious day spent in melancholy and misery, which was not cheared with a single ray of consolation, the return of evening brought the doctor, who, at the request of Mrs. Romney, called upon him, though he had not intended to make him a visit at that time.

The first sight of the doctor filled Sir William with still more terror than Mr. Besfield's visit had excited. He was sitting in a chair, leaning his head upon

his hand, and every now and then lifting up his eyes to heaven, for its aid and assistance to support his Sophia. He started from his seat, and stood like the image of Despair.

The doctor, observing the condition he was in with real concern, accosted him with a very chearful air: ‘ Don’t
‘ be alarmed, Sir William ; I have been
‘ to see my patient, and though she is
‘ far from well, yet I hope soon to give
‘ you a more favourable account of her.
‘ She is, to be sure, deeply afflicted at
‘ her loss, but I see no immediate danger.
‘ Her restoration to health and
‘ spirits must be the work of time ; that,
‘ and good Mrs. Romney’s tender care
‘ of her, who is a most excellent nurse,
‘ will, I doubt not, re-establish her
‘ health.’

‘ All gracious heaven be praised!’ said Sir William, coming a little to himself ;
‘ spare no attendance to preserve a life
‘ so truly estimable. Was she sensible ?
‘ Did

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‘ Did she know you? Is not she vastly
‘ changed?’ continued he, sighing.

The doctor did not chuse to be too explicit in regard to her disorder, for fear a sudden turn might happen; but in order to divert Sir William’s thoughts, he told him that, if he would give him leave, he would stay all night with him, and then he should be the more ready to pay his early attendance at Mrs. Beecher’s in the morning?

‘ Ah! doctor,’ cried Sir William, with great emotion, ‘ you think then
‘ that she is in danger?’

‘ So far from it, Sir William, said
‘ he, that they don’t know, at Mrs.
‘ Beecher’s, of my intention to sleep
‘ here.’

‘ Then you shall not stay,’ said Sir William: ‘ but hold, I will send John
‘ to let my aunt know that you are
‘ here, and to bring me the latest news
‘ about my dearest Sophia.’

D 4

Mr.

Mr. and Mrs. Besfield staid with their niece, till Mr. Beecher's funeral was over. Mr. Besfield, before he went to London, paid another visit to Sir William, whom he found rather more composed, and was overwhelmed with his civilities. He thanked him for having mentioned doctor Wise to him, who behaved, he said, like a man of sense and a gentleman, and was very diffuse in his praises.

Sir William interrupted him to talk of his dear Mrs. Beecher. 'As it may not, perhaps, be agreeable yet to her that I should go to her house, I wish Mrs. Romney would let the child come with his nurse to me; be assured that I will endeavour to supply the loss of a father to him, and ever look upon him as my own son.'

Mr. Besfield expressed his sense of Sir William's goodness in very proper terms, and just hinted that Sophy would be the most ungrateful of women, if she did

did not, after a decent time, return his uncommon affection.

• ‘ Mrs. Beecher, Sir,’ replied Sir William, ‘ has ever conducted herself with
‘ so much propriety in every respect,
‘ and with such a distinguished delicacy, that I shall leave it to her alone
‘ to determine my future happiness ; as
‘ I am more than ever convinced that
‘ I can never enjoy any felicity, unless
‘ this adorable woman shares it with
‘ me. Perhaps that invaluable blessing
‘ may be always out of my reach ; at
‘ least, however, I have some reason to
‘ flatter myself with hopes of her friendship, if it pleases heaven to restore
‘ her health. I will not divest myself
‘ of that heart-felt satisfaction, by forming expectations that she may feel a
‘ repugnance in gratifying.’

As Sir William pronounced these words in a determined manner, Mr. Besfield dropped the subject, and soon after departed.

Poor Sophia, though she was not immediately devoted to the jaws of death, continued in the weakest and most dejected state to be imagined for a considerable time. When the first violence of her grief was a little abated, it left a fever upon her spirits, which disturbed her rest, and confined her to her chamber. She spent the tedious melancholy hours in sorrowing over her dear Beecher with Mrs. Romney, who, for a long while, urged the duty and advantage of resignation and submission to the decrees of Providence, but urged them in vain.

Sophia was always ready enough to acknowledge the force of her friend's arguments, and the justness of her reasoning, but could not always command her passions. At last, however, her sincere piety and fervent prayers for strength to support herself under her heavy load of affliction, joined to the caresses of the little innocent Edward, gave a calmness to her mind, which she had not for many weeks experienced. But though she became more composed,
the

the doctor could not, by all the remedies which he prescribed, get the better of her fever. It was for a long time so strong upon her, that he dared not to let her even go down stairs, for fear the air, and agitation in moving, should be too much for her.

Sir William, while things were in this situation at Rose-Hill, languished out the tiresome hours in sorrow and suspense. A thousand times did he lament his unhappy condition. ‘ Were it not, ‘ said he, for the cruel custom of the ‘ world, I might at this very moment ‘ attend upon my dear angel, endeavour ‘ to sooth her grief, and scheme a variety of amusements to chace away her ‘ melancholy thoughts. I succeeded in ‘ this way, continued he, one day to ‘ doctor Wise, wonderfully, when she ‘ was so ill at Windsor.’

‘ You did so, said the doctor, but ‘ here the case is widely different; she ‘ had no fever then, she had only anxiety to struggle with; but though

‘ Mrs. Romney is indefatigable about
‘ her, and is continually thinking of
‘ something to amuse her ; and though
‘ her little son, when she is playing
‘ with him, does amuse her, and dis-
‘ sipate her gloomy thoughts, yet this
‘ slow fever still remains, and till that
‘ is removed entirely, she must neither
‘ go out of the house, nor even her
‘ room. Amusement abroad would in-
‘ deed be of great service to her, if it
‘ could be procured with safety ; but
‘ such amusement is not yet to be at-
‘ tempted. Besides, continued he, if
‘ she was better, I should be afraid of
‘ her seeing you, till she had got
‘ strength enough to support so affect-
‘ ing an interview.’

‘ Why, why, my dear Wife,’ cried Sir
William hastily, ‘ can you suppose that
‘ she still retains either aversion enough
‘ to, or affection enough for me, to be
‘ embarrassed or shocked at the sight of
‘ me ?

‘ Consider,

‘ Consider, Sir William,’ replied the doctor, ‘ that she is in too delicate a situation at present to bear any new object ; and can you in your turn suppose, that she was either averse or insensible, even during the life of Mr. Beecher, to your very uncommon attachment to her, after you had lost all hopes of her, or unconcerned at all the sufferings you have endured on that occasion ? A sincere friendship, a real esteem, you ever thought she felt for you, and you were certainly not mistaken. She still, undoubtedly, retains that friendship, that esteem for you ; and would you then expose her, all weak and disordered as she is, to the agitation she must necessarily feel at your first meeting, after so long, and of late so melancholy a separation ?’

‘ Ah ! no, my dear doctor,’ said Sir William, ‘ not for a thousand worlds. You give me new life ; you flatter me with new hopes ; you encourage me to believe that I still am happy in
her

‘ her esteem; but you will absolutely
‘ kill me if you cannot conquer this
‘ cruel fever: the very idea of it drives
‘ me to despair. But go, fly, my dear
‘ friend, employ all your skill to give
‘ health and tranquility once more to
‘ that lovely creature. Restore her
‘ person to its former beauty, and do all
‘ you can to make peace return to that
‘ tender bosom, in which all my happiness is centered.’

While the doctor made his visit to Mrs. Beecher, whom, to his great surprise, but extreme satisfaction, he found prodigiously mended, Sir William was by turns buoyed up with hope, by turns depressed with fear, and, under the dominion of these opposite passions, was agitated by a variety of pleasurable and painful sensations. Now, animated by hope, he fancied that he saw his Sophia all gentle, soft and endearing in her behaviour; as gentle, as soft, and as endearing as when she blessed his eyes at Windsor. Now, frozen with fear, he beheld her pale, wretched, and incapable

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pable either of seeing or of knowing him, just ready to expire. A multitude of such gay, such gloomy images perpetually presented themselves to his mind, and for a long time rendered him unwilling to take either rest or food. He became, in short, for want of sustenance and sleep, little less pale and languid than Sophia.

When the doctor, returning from Mrs. Beecher, told him that her fever was somewhat abated, Sir William felt his joy as troublesome as his grief had been; for the perturbation of his mind on that account, prevented him from receiving any advantages from it. He then questioned the doctor very closely, and pressed him to declare whether she ever mentioned him.

‘She very frequently,’ said the doctor, ‘enquires after your health, and expresses the greatest satisfaction at the regard which you shew for her little son.’

Sophia,

Sophia, at Sir William's request, often sent little Edward to him, and he always caressed the pretty infant in the tenderest manner, with emotions of pleasure, occasioned by his being so nearly related to the dear object of his affections, and by his growing more like her every day.

Edward, by seeing Sir William often, became accustomed to his playing with him, frequently threw his innocent arms round his neck, and treated him with all the marks of infantine fondness which he shewed to his mother. Sir William, delighted with this winning behaviour in his Sophia's sweet representative, began to interest himself as much in his health, as he did in that of his amiable parent. He purchased a great number of toys, fit for such a child's amusement, many of which were indeed too rich and too beautiful for so young a child; but they thoroughly convinced Sophia, to whom his nurse (for she was forced to have one when she was taken so ill) gave them, Sir William's regard for her was greater than

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than ever. ‘ His affection for my dear
‘ child, said she, leaves me no room to
‘ doubt of his esteem for me.’

As soon as Mrs. Beecher grew something better, Sir William wrote to his aunt Romney, to thank her for her care and tenderness to his charming Sophia, and begged her to assure her, that it gave him the highest pleasure to hear of her amendment; adding, that he hoped now to receive news of her increasing recovery.

Though there was not a word in Sir William’s letter that could authorize Sophia to look upon him as a lover, so fearful had he been of giving offence, it was filled with the warmest professions of respect, regard, friendship, and esteem.

Mrs. Romney answered it; and Mrs. Beecher desired her thanks might be returned for his many favours to her little son.

Sophia’s

Sophia's fever had now quite left her, and the doctor gave her leave to come down stairs.

Sir William, when he heard of this favourable movement, was truly transported, and pleased himself again with the hopes of seeing once more the darling of his heart, the idol of his imagination. In the midst of his transports, little Beecher was seized with the small-pox; and though he had few spots, and was not in much danger, the sudden appearance of so alarming a disorder, so soon after the death of her husband, very much retarded his mother's recovery, who, notwithstanding all Mrs. Romney's dissuasions, would attend him herself; and as the sort was that which is longest in turning, her confinement was more tedious than it would otherwise have been, and contributed to lower her spirits extremely.

Sir William, who shared all her trouble, was not a little afflicted by it; all the relief he had, was in writing to Mrs. Romney,

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Romney, and expressing his concern for the sweet child and his amiable mother.

When her Edward recovered, the fatigue both of body and mind, which Mrs. Beecher had endured, threw her into such a dejection of spirits, that she could hardly bear the burden of existence. Sir William, therefore, redoubled his importunities to Dr. Wise, to think of something to remove this new, and, if possible, worse disorder than the other.

Mrs. Romney, when Sophia was now and then tolerably chearful, went home, in order to change the scene, and to look after her family. ‘ You can’t think,’ said she, one day to her nephew, ‘ what Sophia has gone through; ‘ it is impossible to describe the alteration which sorrow and sickness have ‘ made in her.’

Sir William wept, and intreated his aunt not to leave her, till she was herself

self willing to part with her, though her visits gave him infinite pleasure, because they gave him an opportunity to converse freely about his Sophia.

Dr. Wise, at last, projected a scheme, which might, he imagined, be of great service to Mrs. Beecher.

The weather was now very fine, and the days began to lengthen. Sophia had been confined during the greatest part of the winter, and the severity of the weather had made her confinement more necessary. Mr. Beecher had been now dead above eight months, and though her grief for his loss did not break out so often in plaintive accents, the extreme lowness of her spirits gave her friend room to believe that she indulged it in privacy. From this situation, therefore, of Mrs. Beecher's body and mind, Mrs. Romney thought that a diversity of objects would do more towards her recovery, than a variety of medicines, and was happy to find doctor Wise of her opinion, whose design was
to

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to persuade his patient to go to Buxton Wells, for a month or six weeks.

Doctor Wise, before he communicated his design to Mrs. Beecher, acquainted Sir William with it. ‘Change of place, said he, is absolutely requisite for her, and variety of company will be not less necessary.’

Sir William heard him with tolerable patience, and then cried, ‘She must go, my dear Wife; every thing necessary for her health must be immediately thought of. But good God! what will become of me? Can I remain at the distance of so many miles from all that is dear to me in life? Can I exist at that distance from my Sophia, for a month or six weeks? Oh! Wife, Wife, never think that I will consent to such a journey. I cannot support the idea of it; and to let her go without having seen her above eight months since she has been at liberty. Oh! this, this is too much to exact from me. Sure I may now visit her

‘ as

‘ as a friend ; as the friend, the guardian of her dear little Edward.’

‘ Take care, Sir William,’ said the doctor, ‘ how you venture ; be not too
‘ hasty ; her spirits are still too weak ;
‘ be advised, a little matter may now
‘ either very much retard a cure, or promote a perfect one : and as I am no
‘ stranger to your feelings upon this occasion, suppose you and I go down to
‘ Buxton soon after the two ladies ? At
‘ this time of the year I can be spared
‘ from home ; but if I could not, the
‘ many marks of friendship which I
‘ have received from Sir William, would
‘ make me give up every thing to endeavour to preserve a life on which, I
‘ plainly see, your own depends as
‘ much as ever ; and I am not surprised at it : Mrs. Beecher is surely a most
‘ amiable woman!’——

Here Sir William interrupted him with such an exclamation of joy——

‘ My dear Wife, said he, let me embrace you for this happy thought.
‘ What

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‘ What transport, what rapture shall I
‘ feel, to be again blessed with the sight,
‘ with the conversation of my charm-
‘ ing angel? O! I am overwhelmed
‘ with joy! I can’t, I can’t express it as I
‘ would—I want words, words, doctor—
‘ Come to my arms—you are a friend
‘ indeed.’

‘ Hold, Sir William,’ replied the
doctor, smiling at his ecstasies, ‘ we
‘ must be very cautious; we have a
‘ nice point to manage; you must pro-
‘ mise to be a little governable at first,
‘ and not desire to see her, till she is
‘ got down, and has recovered the fa-
‘ tigue of her journey, which will not-
‘ withstanding do her a great deal of
‘ good. The air and exercise together
‘ will give a new turn to her spirits;
‘ she will be better able to receive you,
‘ and you will with more firmness bear
‘ the affecting sight of her, after so long
‘ an illness, especially as her present
‘ situation in life is quite different from
‘ what you have ever seen her in.’

‘ I com-

‘ I comprehend you, my dear Wife,’
said Sir William; ‘ I know too well the
‘ distance and respect that are due to
‘ Mrs. Beecher; and that I must never
‘ perhaps,’ added he with a deep sigh,
‘ think of her again, as I have done, as
‘ my Sophia. But though, all gentle
‘ and compassionate, she once out of
‘ pity permitted my endearments, at a
‘ time when she almost looked upon
‘ me as her husband, she must well re-
‘ member, that I never took an impro-
‘ per advantage of her great condes-
‘ cension. I never abused her goodness;
‘ and though I could have sometimes
‘ almost given up my life when she ap-
‘ peared so lovely, so enchantingly pleas-
‘ ing, to have had the most trifling
‘ mark of tenderness in return, I never
‘ pressed her, I never teased her to give
‘ me proofs of a passion which she, I
‘ was but too strongly convinced, never
‘ felt in the manner I wished. No, no,
‘ doctor, you need not be afraid of my
‘ taking any indiscreet liberties with a
‘ woman whom I revere as much as I
‘ love.’

Sir

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Sir William would certainly have said a great deal more upon so interesting a subject, but the doctor thought he had said enough, and told him that Mrs. Romney alone must be acquainted with their intentions. ‘We must both join,’ continued he, ‘in persuading Mrs. Beecher to go, which will perhaps be no easy task.’

While the doctor was gone to carry his design into execution, Sir William, was racked by a variety of painful sensations; afraid that he should not prevail on his patient to undertake the journey; equally afraid that she would not be able to bear it: and though he died with impatience, with the most ardent desire to behold her, he shook with apprehension, lest she should receive him with coldness and indifference, if not with aversion and disgust. ‘And yet,’ said he, ‘what right have I to expect any thing but indifference?—Yes, I can even support that, provided I do but see her once more happy.’

Dr. Wise, for some time, met with a powerful opposition to his proposal for going to Buxton, by Mrs. Beecher. She had not strength, she urged, nor spirits to undergo so long a journey. She could not venture to take her dear little Edward, nor could she think of going without her best friend Mrs. Romney. ‘Will you not go with me, my dearest friend?’ continued she, turning to her. ‘But then who must take care of my sweet child?’

Mrs. Romney in answer told her, that she should certainly not let her go by herself, and that she entirely disapproved of her taking her son with her, as he was so young. ‘Send to Mr. and Mrs. Besfield, my dear, said she, and ask them to come here; it is summer, and they may perhaps have no objection to such an airing. Leave your house and your son to their care till your return.’

‘There never was a luckier thought, madam,’ said the doctor; ‘let me in-
‘ treat

‘ treat you,’ continued he to Mrs. Beecher, in the most pressing manner, ‘ to follow this lady’s advice without loss of time.’

Sophia at last complied, merely because she was tired of resistance. A letter was wrote immediately to her uncle and aunt, who promised, by the return of the post, to be with her in a week or ten days at farthest.

When doctor Wise informed Sir William of Mr. Besfield’s answer, he exclaimed violently against him and Mrs. Besfield, for the slowness of their motions, and was almost mad at their delay. They arrived, however, sooner than they promised; and the journey to Buxton was then, to his great joy, forwarded with the utmost expedition.

When the morning of their departure appeared, the separation from her dear Edward affected Mrs. Beecher extremely: a thousand times did she press his pretty innocent face to her’s, and as

often wetted his little cheeks with her tears. But when Mrs. Besfield, who was, she knew, very fond of children, promised never to let him be out of her sight, and to send her frequent news of his health, she left him in that good lady's arms, and, assisted by her uncle and Dr. Wise, got into the post-chaise, and was followed by Mrs. Romney.

As soon as they were gone, the doctor hurried to Sir William, whom he found all wild with impatience to be after them. They set off very soon in his chariot and four, which was ordered to keep at proper stages, just behind them; but John was strictly charged not to lose sight of Mrs. Beecher's carriage, lest she might be taken ill and want assistance, or for fear any accident should happen.

As the weather favoured them, their journey proved agreeable; and as the doctor had told Mrs. Beecher that he was going to Buxton, she was not at all surprised to see him the next morning
in

in her apartment, where he had the pleasure of seeing her better than he expected. She determined to appear no oftener in public than was absolutely necessary; the situation of her mind, and her ill health, gave her no inclination to make a public appearance. The doctor left her to act in this respect entirely as she pleased; he only insisted that she should walk about, and use all the gentle exercise she was able to bear. But either from want of spirits, or from the delicacy of her constitution, she was extremely loth to follow that prescription, though she had been there several days.

Sir William, from the moment of his arrival at Buxton, flattered himself with the pleasure of stealing a look at his dear Sophia, when she walked out, unperceived by her: but when he found that she kept very close to her apartments, he could no longer stifle his uneasiness. 'For G-d's sake,' cried he, one day to Dr. Wise, 'let me see her, or I shall die.'

The doctor laughed, and told him that he must be patient till the next day, in the morning of which, finding her pretty well, he asked her if she thought she could bear the sight of an old friend.

She started a little: every thing, so weak were her nerves, alarmed her. 'Who is it, Sir?' said she, looking very much surprised.

'Sir William Acres, madam,' replied he, 'who has not, you know, been very well for some time. Hearing that I was coming down to this place, he was so kind as to bring me.'

She changed colour, and hesitated. But as the natural turn which the doctor had given to Sir William's arrival could not possibly give her the least offence, she seemed to reproach herself for her hesitation, by answering with a quick tone, 'I am under too many obligations to Sir William Acres, not to be always glad to see him.'

The

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The doctor immediately called a servant, and sent him to Sir William, with the news of Mrs. Beecher's being ready to receive him.

Sir William was at the door of her apartment almost as soon as he received the joyful message. He approached her with a timid respectful air, and attempted to speak; but from the violence of his emotions, his words died upon his lips. She was herself no less affected at his appearance; he was no longer the lively, agreeable, spirited figure she left him, to give her hand to Beecher: he was pale and emaciated: his eyes, which used to strike fire at the sight of her, were sunk and unanimated. Dull as they were, however, he fixed them on her with such a melting languor, which, added to the concern she felt at beholding him so altered, and the consciousness of having been the cause of the alteration which she beheld, brought such a confused crowd of images to her memory, that she fainted away on the chair she sat in.

Sir William, terrified to death, screamed. The doctor and Mrs. Romney soon recovered her. What a pathetic scene!

When she was a little composed, she apologized for her behaviour, which she desired might be attributed to her bad state of health. The doctor, however, perceiving that neither she nor Sir William was capable of entering upon a conversation with each other, winked at Mrs. Romney, and talked about indifferent things, till they at last fell insensibly into chat with them.

Mrs. Beecher, before Sir William took his leave, took an opportunity to thank him for the numberless marks of his regard for her little son; and he expatiated so much on the agreeable person and pleasing ways of little Edward, that he gave thereby a vivacity to her countenance, equal to that which he had formerly with so much rapture admired. This sprightliness being at the same time blended with all the tender affection of a parent,
added

added such an inexpressible softness to her eyes, that he was almost deprived of his senses while he gazed upon them. He looked at her full of love, but full of respect and reverential awe, which prevented him from discovering the delightful tumults of his soul: severely did he struggle to suppress them, and in the midst of such a conflict with inclination, he would have made a strange appearance in the eyes of any other persons but those who were too well acquainted with the cause of it to think it unnatural. How various, how unaccountable are the movements of the human heart!

This first interview being happily over, Sir William and Mrs. Beecher saw each other every day: and though the latter did not mix with the company at the Wells, as Dr. Wise, who had a large acquaintance there, and was a very entertaining man, associated with them; he and Sir William, who never saw her but in the doctor's presence, while she was at Buxton, had always a number of

diverting incidents to relate to her. This chearful manner of passing their time, with excursions now and then to view the neighbouring villas and prospects, which were extremely striking and romantic; and the frequent letters she received from Rose-Hill, which informed her of little Edward's welfare, in about six weeks perfectly restored her health, and in a great measure her spirits. Nothing but a kind of languor remained, for which she could only account by supposing that the traces of her former illness were not quite removed.

When Sir William heard of her being desirous to leave Buxton, he received the news with the deepest regret. Having been for some time accustomed to see her now every day, he did not know how far he might trespass upon her hours when she returned home; or whether indeed she would admit him at all. He was alarmed, though he had no reason to suppose that she would be averse to his company in any place, as she treated him with the greatest civility, nay, with evident

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dent marks of esteem ; but he was alarmed, and imputed the civilities he received from her, to the circumspection of his own behaviour, as he took particular care to conduct himself with the tender politeness of a respectful friend. He just mentioned a word or two of concern at her going to quit Buxton. She told him that she had been a great while from home, and that as Mrs. Besfield, she found, wanted to return to London, she could by no means trust her little son to the care of servants.

Sir William, though he dreaded her departure, admired her maternal tenderness. The ladies returned to Rose-Hill in the manner they came from it, with this difference only, that Sir William and the doctor, who followed their carriage to Buxton, now accompanied it, and by travelling together, the journey proved doubly agreeable to them all.

When Mrs. Beecher arrived at her house, Sir William conducted her into it. As soon as she entered, she flew to

caress her lovely Edward, whom she was vastly glad to find in perfect health.

The next morning she received a very fine basket of fruit from Sir William, with a particular enquiry after her health and Mrs. Romney's; and an intreaty to be permitted to pay his compliments to her after dinner. She sent an obliging answer, and employed the fore part of the day in thanking Mr. and Mrs. Besfield for taking so much care of her son.

As the affairs of Mr. and Mrs. Besfield called them to town that day, who were also to meet Miss West in London, on her return from Windsor with her aunt Greville, they left her before dinner.

Just as the tea-things were ranged, Sir William appeared: he was dressed, and never looked so well: the waters of Buxton, or rather the company, and recovery of Mrs. Beecher, had amazingly restored his health. The joy which he felt

felt at being permitted to wait on her ; the seeming pleasure with which she received him ; a sweet languor in her eyes, which he imputed to the remains of the fatigue after her journey ; all united to inspire him with sensations of delight, which he had never felt before, and which had such an effect upon his air and manner, that he was absolutely a fine figure. He begged to see little Edward, who remembered him, and by stretching out his innocent arms in fondness to him, filled him with new emotions. When he returned him to his mother, and saw her devour him with kisses, his heart fluttered at the sight, and he longed to share them. She delivered him to his nurse, and he was calm again.

Mrs. Romney now began to talk of going home with him, but Sophia could not bear to hear a word about it. ‘ I cannot part with you yet, my dear friend,’ said she, with the most plaintive accent. ‘ Can you, Sir William,’ continued she, ‘ be so very good as to
‘ spare

‘ spare my amiable friend a little longer?’ She saw her request granted almost as soon as made by a look from him, the most expressive in the world, which she thoroughly understood, and for which she made him ample amends by her acknowledgments.

Sir William’s first employment, when he got home from Rose-Hill, was to contrive some decent excuse for returning thither. He did not long want one, for love is ever fertile in expedients. His aunt being there, took off all impropriety from his visits to his mistress: he went therefore the next day at the same hour, to the house in which he placed all his happiness. Sophia seemed to be not displeased with him, and he continued his visits.

Dr. Wise, who now also visited upon the footing of a friend, still proved a very necessary one: he advised Mrs. Beecher, in whom he thought he saw too great a tendency to dejection, to use exercise. He proposed riding, and Sir
William

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William immediately offered the horse she had been used to; but she begged to be excused; she could not bear, she said, the thoughts of riding; and indeed Sir William's kind offer brought the idea of her renewing her acquaintance with Beecher too strongly to her memory.

The doctor then told her that she must walk out every evening, as some kind of exercise was of the utmost consequence. To this she consented, and spent those evenings which favoured such exercise according to the advice of her physician, leaning on the arm of her faithful friend, with her faithful lover by her side. These walks, as they were in the most picturesque part of the country, opened a variety of new scenes, which were every moment agreeably shifted, and gave rise to a number of local observations and entertaining reflections, in the communication of which Sir William and she gave striking proofs of the solidity of their understandings, and the elegance of their tastes.

When

When the weather was not fine enough for these gentle excursions, Sir William, who had again begun to furnish her with all the new literary productions, read to her and his aunt something which had both novelty and entertainment to recommend it. As few people more happily acquitted themselves in reading, they heard him with particular pleasure. He always suited his voice, which was musical, and adapted his action, which was always just, to the subject before him; and when that subject happened to be of the tender kind (and it happened not unfrequently to be so) his looks were so eloquent, his elocution so sweet, and his manner so energetic, that he touched the souls of his hearers. And as his eyes were almost always, whatever he was doing, fixed on his dear Mrs. Beecher, she sometimes found their glances too tender, and was not a little puzzled in the disposal of her own, which insensibly, and without her perception, languished with the same tenderness.

Sir

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Sir William longed to hear his Sophia's sweet voice again; but he was afraid to ask her for a song, imagining that she might not think it proper to indulge him. One day, however, when she was in uncommon spirits, he ventured to mention music. She begged him not to take her refusal amiss, as she had not practised for a great while, and was really incapable of complying with his request. So soft a denial did not disconcert him.

Her whole behaviour, indeed, was so very obliging, that he grew more and more satisfied with it every hour; though he had not the least hope of advancing any farther in her favour. Day after day he saw her smile on him; he heard her melting accents, which not only charmed his ear, they went directly to his heart. He had not, 'tis true, ventured to touch her, though sometimes he did by chance, and then his whole frame was in such a tremor that he knew not how to conceal it.

If

If Sir William was thus affected by accidentally touching his Sophia, she, in her turn, felt emotions to which she had not been accustomed, emotions all in his favour; emotions which in all her former, her most intimate connections with him, she had never felt. But her situation was now widely different. At the time of his first acquaintance with her, her heart was strongly prepossessed in favour of another, for her disregard and ill-usage of whom she always severely condemned herself; and so naturally was she disposed to act right, she could not relish any pleasure till she had repaired the faults of which, to her own conscience, she stood accused. Those faults had been now amply repaired. She had lived with her husband till the moment of his decease, with the utmost domestic harmony and conjugal felicity, which was never interrupted, but by the sufferings of Sir William. Whenever those sufferings rose in her memory, they filled her with a mixture of compassion and remorse: when she was reminded of them, they drew from her tender eyes a pitying

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pitying tear, and from her gentle breast an involuntary sigh, because she could not think on what he suffered, without, in some degree, blaming herself. But the sincere affection she had for her dear Beecher, soon effaced all these disagreeable ideas; she spent all her days in making him the happiest of men, and when she lost him, no-body could have been more sensibly, more sincerely afflicted. Nay, to such a height did her affliction rise, that it almost endangered her life, which probably would have been sacrificed to the manes of her husband, had not the youth and the helpless condition of her little son demanded her tenderest care, and forced her to preserve an existence of which she was entirely weary. Long did she struggle in a situation the most uncertain to be conceived; but her own youth, and originally good constitution, with the pleasing improvements which she every day perceived in her lovely child, at length restored her. Little Beecher throve extremely; he was perfectly well, and her heart was just recovering its former tranquillity,

quility, when Sir William again introduced himself to her.

Sir William had ever been esteemed by all women a most agreeable man; the majority of them, who came in his way, had found him a very dangerous one; and Sophia would, doubtless, have found him so, had she not become at first acquainted with him with a heart attached to Beecher. But now he was for ever removed from her; and though she still lamented him, still paid a frequent tribute of sighs and tears to his memory, when alone, yet she never felt herself so easy, so happy, as when she was in Sir William's company. When he was not at her house, she was always melancholy, nay, she was sometimes peevish. As Mrs. Romney, who had been her constant companion, and had seen her in all her distresses, never had observed the least tendency to fretfulness in her, she was surprised at this change in her temper. But the approach of Sir William banished every gloomy, every serious look, and her countenance was
instan-

instantaneously lighted up with the smiles of chearfulness, and the graces of love.

The penetrating Mrs. Romney soon observed this, astonishing alteration in her friend, and observed it with infinite satisfaction, but was determined to be quite silent upon the occasion. She seemed to see nothing unusual in her looks, or her behaviour: she was sure of Sir William's being ready to take her as soon as she was willing to be his: she even perceived so much impatience in him, for which she could not blame him after what he had gone through, that she was afraid he would not be able to contain himself till he was certain that his Sophia wished him to speak. This was the point to which she longed to bring her young friend. She thought that her nephew, and she thought justly, well deserved a return of those pains and perplexities which he had himself so smartly endured for her, and therefore left them to come to an eclarcissement in their own way.

Sophia,

Sophia, thinking herself quite unobserved by Mrs. Romney, was frequently off her guard. But though she could not conceal her sensations in favour of Sir William, she blamed herself for encouraging them, and was, in her own opinion, very reprehensible for entertaining an uncommon regard for a man, who, though he once had professed the most extravagant passion for her, discovered nothing farther, at this time, according to her observation, than a firm friendship, and a real concern for the loss she had sustained, and the melancholy with which she had been oppressed. She sighed often at the remembrance of his former affection; she wished often for the revival of those happy days, when not a moment passed without his discovering fresh marks of his tenderness and love.

These were the sincere sentiments of Mrs. Beecher in favour of Sir William, but she blushed to indulge them. She sometimes thought them injurious to the memory of her husband, and was shocked.

shocked. But when she reflected on the respectful manner in which he ever mentioned Sir William, the regard which he always professed for him, and his dying request in case of a second marriage, she fancied she was not very culpable in feeling an inclination for him; especially when she also considered, that he had almost destroyed himself for the sake of giving her up to make her happy. 'Why then,' said she, in a whisper to herself, 'why then does he not retain the same sentiments for me? Why does he no longer love me? Am I so altered by grief and illness as to become disagreeable? It must be so, and his frequent visits, civilities, and assiduities, are merely out of politeness and compassion.'

Tears accompanied these reflections, and she reddened with shame, though she was quite alone. She blushed at her weakness, and resolved to call pride to her assistance, to behave to him with indifference. But, such are the resolutions of those deeply in love, at the
very

very moment she made her resolves, they vanished. The natural sweetness of her disposition prompted her to consider how unjust it would be to treat a man with harshness and rigour, who had ever behaved, and still behaved to her with the greatest respect, attention, and veneration. ‘ Yet,’ said she again, in a soliloquy, ‘ what right have I to alter my conduct to him? If I have no design upon his heart, I ought to receive him in the manner he chuses to appear to me; and if I change my behaviour, he must conclude that I have reason for it. This will inevitably expose my weakness, and give him cause to triumph indeed.’

End of the SEVENTH BOOK.

THE
HISTORY
OF
Miss SOPHIA FANBROOK.
BOOK VIII.

WHILE Sophia was thus accusing her heart for revolting against her, Sir William's bosom was not in a more tranquil state. It was with the utmost difficulty that he prevented himself from discovering a
Vol. III. F passion

passion which was every moment increasing; but when he gave himself leave to reflect on the happiness he enjoyed, he was afraid to aim at still greater felicity, lest he should have none. ‘ I
‘ have the greatest reason in the world,’ said he, often to himself, ‘ to be easy;
‘ if she does not absolutely love me, she
‘ seems, at least, to be pleased with my
‘ company; she receives my little assiduities with politeness, nay, with an
‘ apparent satisfaction. She is so very
‘ good, as to look upon me as an esteemed friend; as a man for whom
‘ she has some regard, whom she has
‘ tried, and in whom she knows she can
‘ put a confidence. Shall I then, by
‘ sighing after what may perhaps be
‘ never in her power to give me, deprive myself of these invaluable enjoyments, with which I was never
‘ blessed before? There is no-body
‘ now to rival me in her heart, but her
‘ sweet boy; and he is so perfect a resemblance of his lovely mother, both
‘ in person and temper, that I doat on
‘ the dear infant, as extravagantly as I
‘ do

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‘ do on this charming woman. And
‘ shall I then, by asking for more than
‘ she is inclined to bestow, forfeit that
‘ confidence which she reposes in me,
‘ which, no doubt, is the cause of her
‘ treating me in so friendly a manner?’

While such thoughts as these were employing the minds of Sir William and Sophia, they could not but feel mutual pleasure in being together. Sir William, however, made his visits yet only in an afternoon, and, till they had taken to walk in an evening, had never supped together; but as they never sallied out on those parties till the heat of the day was over, their return generally happened about supper-time; Sophia therefore could not avoid asking him, when that was the case, to stay; and he certainly never refused her. There was indeed always something so particular in her manner of asking him, that he could not help being particularly charmed with it. Whenever she uttered any of her little requests, her voice was unusually softened; and there was such a

melting sweetness in it, that resistance was impossible, if inclination had been ever so urgent: and whenever he complied with a respectful bow, and his eyes thrown down with timidity, lest the joy which sparkled in them, on his being so flatteringly distinguished by her, should too much offend her delicacy, her looks, expressive of gratitude and pleasure, strove to repay him for granting what was with the greatest transport to be desired. She soon also found out by Mrs. Romney, to whom she was continually talking of him when he was absent, what his palate was most pleased with, and constantly provided it; but by being ignorant of her kind intentions, he lost an infinite deal of pleasure: if he had known those intentions, every little repast would have been a celestial banquet to him.

Dr. Wise, as well as Mrs. Romney, though not being constantly with the lovers, he had not opportunities of making so many observations as she did, thought he saw a great change in Mrs. Beecher's

Beecher's behaviour in Sir William's favour; but he was not quite certain of it, and if he had been so, he would have wished to have had his conjectures confirmed by herself. He did not wait long for a confirmation of them.

Sir William had been one day detained a few minutes beyond his usual time of visiting, and Mrs. Beecher grew impatient at his delay. Hearing the approach of a chariot, she concluded he was in it. Her heart fluttered, with expectation, and pleasure danced in her eyes. In this situation the entrance of doctor Wise threw her into another, the most opposite to be conceived. Her disappointment was excessive, and she could not hide it. She turned as pale as death, and was just ready to faint. The doctor sitting down by her, asked her if she was well, and felt her pulse (at that instant Sir William's carriage drew up to the door). As he felt a violent change in it, he was curious enough to wish to see whether

he had drawn just conclusions from the observations which he had made. He kept her hand in his own a moment, with his eyes fixed on her face. While he was in this attitude of curiosity, Sir William entered the room; she blushed, and her cheeks were as red as scarlet. Sir William started: though Dr. Wise was her physician, yet she was lovely; the doctor had more than once declared that he thought her so. He had often seen him feel her pulse, without being alarmed; but in feeling it now, he thought he saw in his eyes, which were rivetted on her, a particular meaning. The doctor, indeed, was so earnestly employed in gratifying his curiosity, that he made not the least alteration in his attitude when Sir William appeared, and thereby increased the embarrassment he was thrown into by the confusion of Sophia. He stopped, and instead of looking at her with that high delight which he always felt on a review of her charms, even after so short an absence, he was thoughtful, collected, serious, and unhappy.

Sophia

Sophia saw this alteration in Sir William in an instant, and felt it; she fancied that dislike, nay that anger, was expressed in his looks, and she could no longer keep her seat. She rose hastily, and went into the garden.

Sir William, astonished at her retreat, said to his aunt, in order to stop her, in a dejected tone, 'Is not Mrs. Beecher well, madam?' 'I don't know,' replied Mrs. Romney, with a half smile at Dr. Wise, 'she was very well just now.'

Sir William turned his eyes briskly upon the doctor, who, though he perfectly comprehended Mrs. Romney's meaning, did not dare to return a smile, but said, rising to take his leave, 'Had you not better, madam, follow Mrs. Beecher?' then bowed to Sir William, and stepped into his chariot.

At any other time Sir William would have strove to detain him, but his mind

was now all confused; he knew not what to think.

Mrs. Romney found Sophia in the garden, in tears, which she endeavoured to conceal, by holding her hand over her eyes, and complained of the head-ach. ‘ Sir William, my dear,’ said she, ‘ is afraid that you are ill. I believe,’ continued she archly, ‘ that he thinks ‘ your running out of the room when he ‘ entered it, rather odd.’

‘ I will go in again, my dear madam, ‘ with you,’ said she, endeavouring to recover herself.

She returned: her eyes glistened with her tears, and her face was still covered with blushes. ‘ I ask your pardon, Sir ‘ William, said she, for leaving you ‘ abruptly; but I was seized with so ‘ violent a pain in my head, and my ‘ spirits were so much oppressed by the ‘ heat of the room, I imagine, that I was ‘ forced to go into the garden for a little air. I hope you will be so good,’
added

added she, with one of the most bewitching smiles that ever adorned a female face, ‘as to excuse the suddenness of my
‘ departure.’

This amiable excuse, with the enchanting manner in which it was delivered, almost over-came Sir William. He gazed on her with uncommon tenderness: he even took her hand, but could not answer her, till the servant brought the tea-equipage: he then said,
‘ As you find this room so close, madam,
‘ would it not be more agreeable for
‘ you to take your tea upon one of the
‘ little seats in the garden?’

‘ By all means,’ said she; and ordering the servant to remove them, she suffered Sir William to lead her thither, and to place himself by her side.

He opened the conversation by assuring her how much he was concerned for the illness of which she complained: and she, with the most lively cheerfulness, assured him it was quite gone off;

adding, that his garden scheme had been of infinite service to her.

He bowed, and beheld her with looks of unutterable affection; but his heart was so full, that he could not speak, or rather was afraid to speak on the only subject to which he most earnestly wished to make her attentive.

She made the tea; but her being so employed did not hinder her from casting, every now and then, a tender glance at her lover. She wished to make a farther apology for her disconcerted behaviour when he came that afternoon; but she was totally at a loss to know how to introduce it. At length, presenting a dish of tea to him, she said, with a languishing accent, ‘ You were ‘ later than usual, Sir William, this afternoon.’

‘ You flatter me, madam, extremely,’ replied he, ‘ in telling me so, and I shall ‘ be particularly careful not to be guilty ‘ that way again.’

As

As Mrs. Romney, just at that moment, was disturbed by a wasp, which had been for some time buzzing round her, she rose to drive him away with her handkerchief; and Mrs. Beecher took that opportunity to say to Sir William, with a gentle sigh, ‘ We are apt to complain of the absence of those whose company is very agreeable to us.’

Sir William started: he thought he heard her distinctly; but as he had never, in all the former hours of fondness, been happy enough to hear such charming sounds, he was afraid to trust his ears; he wished therefore for a repetition of them, that he might be sure he was not mistaken. Leaning therefore forward, in the attitude of attention, with a longing look, and an impassioned air, ‘ Madam’, said he——Confusion instantly seized her; she threw down her eyes, blushed, and was silent; she trembled, and lost all presence of mind. The tea-things would have been upon the ground, if Sir William had not assisted her, who saw, who pitied, though

he could not guess at the cause of her confusion. At the appearance of Mrs. Romney she recovered; but Sir William, who became almost as confused as his Sophia, by reflecting on what he had heard, said little during the remainder of the evening.

When he returned home, those enchanting words, with her sweet confusion, and affecting glances, returned with double force to his imagination. A thousand times did he repeat them; a thousand times did he fancy that he heard them repeated by his Sophia. He felt a pleasure to which his heart had been till then a stranger: he scarcely knew to what he should ascribe it. He was afraid to flatter himself too much: the cruel disappointment which he had once suffered, was fresh in his memory; and he dreaded another. Yet he could not refrain from persuading himself, that she beheld him with far different eyes. Her emotion at his approach; her seeming sometimes to shun him, though with an air of reluctance; and

and the fears which to him she appeared to be seized with, lest Mrs. Romney should discover her feelings; were all strong marks of sensibility, and served to confirm his hopes. ‘But why,’ said he to himself, ‘should she be afraid of my aunt, in whom she places such confidence, for whom she has so sincere a friendship, and whose departure she seems to dread, except she thinks that my aunt will accuse her of being too hasty in shewing an inclination to another, so soon after the death of Beecher? Yet surely, if my lovely Sophia,’ continued he, ‘does really feel any sentiments in my favour, surely there might some allowance be made to so constant a passion. But it is her excessive delicacy, her amiable modesty, which renders her a thousand times more desirable to me. Oh! if I do but at last make an impression on that valuable heart of hers, all, all that I have endured for her sake will be trifling, will be nothing.’

These

These cheering hopes for a while filled him with delight. He then began to imagine that he had only flattered himself that he was agreeable to her, and that there was nothing so common as to be mistaken in cases of this kind: that her friendly reception of him might only arise from a remembrance of his past services, and from a pity of that passion which she still saw he retained for her; from a desire of returning the regard which he shewed for her little son; out of friendship to Mrs. Romney; or perhaps after all, from the natural benignity of her disposition. ‘But then,’ said he, ‘would that sweetness of temper throw her into so much confusion at the sight of me?’

After having assigned a variety of reasons for the behaviour of his Sophia, Sir William at last concluded, that it arose from a desire to conceal the love which she still felt for Beecher. Thoroughly possessed of this idea, he rose disquieted from his soliloquy; yet, as she had been polite enough to appear desirous of

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of his company, he found himself disposed to go very early. He did so: she was alone, and received him with greater emotion than ever, but joy was the cause of it. She wished to thank him for coming so early, but was afraid.

As his aunt was not there, he thought he would try to get an explanation of what she had dropped the day before. He advanced, took her hand, and was just going to speak; but finding that her hand trembled violently while he held it, he was frightened; so much did he dread her displeasure. On the entrance of Mrs. Romney he quitted it.

When they had drank their tea, they went to walk as usual; the evening was uncommonly inviting, and falling into agreeable chat, they fauntered so long, that Sophia, whose spirits were yet but tender, grew faint before her companions shewed any inclination to return. Sir William immediately said, with the utmost anxiety, ‘ You are weary, I see,
Mrs.

‘ Mrs. Beecher ; let me fly home and order the chariot to meet you.’

‘ No, Sir William,’ replied she, with a most obliging smile ; ‘ I had rather a thousand times walk : I will stop for a moment, and then I shall go on again very well.’

While she was making this reply, he employed his eyes to find a place on which she might sit down : seeing a stile, the upper bar of which was broader than the rest, he persuaded her to rest herself upon it. He assisted her in seating herself, and threw one of his arms round her waist, to keep her from falling, holding her hand with the other. By this means he was closer to her than he had been since she left Windsor. He felt her heart beat thro’ her stays, but he was at a loss to know whether the quick palpitation of it arose from pleasure or from pain. Their eyes frequently met : in her’s there was the most affecting languor ; in his the most exquisite tenderness : she could not support

port his looks, and she dared not trust her own. After a short sitting, she told him she was sufficiently rested, and was ready to pursue her walk. He took her down, and she yielded herself to his arms with a sweet reluctance, which, as it discovered more modesty than dislike, increased the number of her beauties. He offered her his arm to lean upon, but she was afraid to accept of it; and thanking him with a smile that almost made him amends for her refusal, took hold of her dear Mrs. Romney.

A day or two after this agreeable strole, the year of mourning for Beecher expired. Sophia told her friend that she would devote that day to his memory in her own apartment. Mrs. Romney endeavoured to oppose this resolution, by telling her that it would only revive her melancholy ideas; but as she endeavoured in vain, she said she would take that opportunity to dine with Sir William. ‘Then you must promise me, replied she, to come back in the evening, or positively I cannot part with you.’

This

This visit of his aunt's, and the occasion of it, confirmed the conjectures of Sir William, with regard to the affection which Sophia still retained for Beecher's memory. And as she was determined, if possible, to let him see, with his own eyes, how well he was beloved, in order to reward his constancy, she concealed from him all her own surmises concerning the mistress of his affections. She had never communicated to him the injunctions which Beecher left her, when he was dying, to reward his love, because she thought that he well deserved the pleasure of inspiring it himself; and she really enjoyed Sophia's confusion, because she thought that she could not, in her turn, suffer too much for Sir William.

Ignorant of this scheme of his fond aunt's, Sir William pestered her with questions about Sophia, relating to her sentiments for Beecher and for him, to which she artfully enough made answers nothing to the purpose. He pressed

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pressed her very closely to tell him what Sophia thought of him.

She replied, that she was not able to dive into her sentiments so nicely, and that if he was so uneasy about them, he had better make her a second offer without hesitating about it.

‘ My dear Mrs. Romney,’ said he, with a deep sigh, ‘ how exquisitely you distress me! You know too well, tho’ you pretend to be unacquainted with them, the delicate sentiments of this lovely angel. You know too well the strong affection which she still, with too much perseverance for her own peace, retains for Beecher. Should I too hastily press her to be mine, and should she refuse me, I shall be lost for ever; or should she grant my request, and grant it with reluctance, I must still be miserable. I think I love her a thousand times more than ever; but I am sure I would not for a thousand worlds possess her person unless I was at the same time the
‘ master

‘ master of her heart. ’Tis for her love,
‘ for that alone, that I languish; and
‘ one look of tenderness, though at such
‘ a distance, that I could scarcely per-
‘ ceive it, would give me more exquisite
‘ delight, than the having her for ages
‘ in my arms without it.’

Mrs. Romney, though she admired Sir William’s just way of thinking, still kept her thoughts about Sophia to herself; and at his request hastened home in the evening. She was in her chamber, spiritless and dejected, and only just asked after Sir William’s health, who being determined, if possible, to observe his amiable Sophia with more than common attention, came at the usual hour.

As the evening proved wet, unfavourable therefore for an evening walk, Sir William carried a book with him, in order to amuse her: he mentioned it, and she told him that it always gave her particular pleasure to hear him read, wishing only that he would
give

give her leave to work in the mean while, as she had something to finish for her little boy. Sir William made her a compliment upon her industry, and she sat down to her needle.

As she had observed, on his first coming in, that his glances were more tender, and much more penetrating than usual; she could not tell how to dispose of her own eyes so properly, during the attention which his eloquent manner of reading commanded, when she had so good an excuse, as on her needle; and she had sufficient occasion for this pretence to hide the different changes she underwent. The little volume which Sir William chose for his purpose, contained poems on several subjects, among which the passion of love was touched with the greatest spirit, pathos, and elegance. She was scarce able to conceal the sensations which she felt, at the expressive looks and emphatic tones of her lover, judiciously varied to convey the tenderness of the sentiments more forcibly to her heart. She was charmed;

ed; she appeared to be so. When he had finished the ode, (it was one of Akenfide's) with a look which applied every thing he had been reading to her; she thanked him for the infinite pleasure he had given to her; a pleasure, she told him (her eyes sparkling with satisfaction, and thereby convincing him more than a thousand words could have done, that she was sincere) of which she had never been sensible before. She then looked down upon her work and blushed, fearing that she had said too much.

Sir William, transported with this little speech of her's, and the blush with which it was accompanied, assured her that he was never so happy as when he was in any shape contributing to afford her entertainment. As he sat close by her, he continued looking at her, while her head was on her work. Not imagining he was so employed, she raised her eyes, just to steal a glance at him, and saw his, at that instant, directed at her with so passionate an air, that their
I beams

beams were not to be endured, after she had been so much affected by his reading. Her whole person was in the most violent agitation; she coloured; she trembled; she was confused: her work dropped from her hands, and fell to the floor. Sir William took it up with one hand, and with the other taking hold of her's, which was now disengaged, he pressed it gently to his bosom, keeping his eyes still fixed on her, in such a manner, that he seemed to be resolved to penetrate into her very soul.

She now grew extremely agitated and confused; she could scarce endure the embarrassed situation she was in, yet could not well get away without appearing to be disgusted at what really had given her the highest delight: and if she had been ever so willing to withdraw from his presence, she had no longer any power to remove herself. Luckily at this critical juncture, a servant coming to inform her supper was ready, relieved her from her painful situation,

situation, painful from the excess of pleasure.

Sir William, though he was not yet willing to flatter himself with these appearances, was far from being displeased; far, however, from imagining himself to be so happy as he had reason to be. She treated him, during the remainder of the evening, with such a perpetual flow of good-humour, and was so very officious while they supped, to help him to every thing she fancied he might like, and smiled with so much complacency at every thing he said, that he grew more lively and joyous than she had ever seen him before: and as by being so, he appeared to greater advantage than usual, she received an additional pleasure in his company.

It was late, before they expected it to be so. Sir William, taking out his watch, found that he had out-staid his usual time by an hour; he started up, and looking at his Sophia with eyes, which, though they sparkled with pleasure,

sure, seemed at the same time to solicit for pardon. ‘I am afraid, Mrs. Beecher,’ said he, ‘that I have greatly trespassed upon your patience to night, and instead of asking your forgiveness, I am going to increase my fault, by laying the blame entirely on yourself, that is, by declaring, madam, that I never yet saw you in such an agreeable humour.’

Sophia blushed and smiled: this little sally of gallantry transported her; she replied by saying, that if he really was sincere in his compliment to her, she could, she believed, return it with equal sincerity, by assuring him that if she herself had been more than commonly chearful, her good spirits had been owing to the pains which he took to amuse her. He bowed respectfully, and stepped into his chariot.

As soon as he was gone, Sophia, with her little heart full of love and gladness, talked of him so much, and in such a manner to Mrs. Romney, that that

worthy lady had the utmost difficulty to keep herself from laughing out; but thinking that as since Sophia's inclination for Sir William, she had observed a little shyness in her, for fear she should discover it, she looked as serious as she could.

On the next morning Belmont called on Sir William, in his way down to his house in the country. As it was pretty early, Sir William was not dressed. Belmont made an exclamation at seeing him in his dishabille, and asked him what he did there loitering, unprepared to visit the charming Mrs. Beecher.

‘ I thought, my friend,’ said Belmont, ‘ to have wished you joy ere now. I am afraid you are dilatory. What, can’t she get over the loss of her husband? I never, indeed, saw Mr. Beecher; but faith, Sir William, I think few women have ever been able to resist thee; thou art a dangerous fellow in their eyes.’

‘ The

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‘ The women you think of,’ replied Sir William, ‘ are of a turn so very different from my Sophia, that if she had the most distant resemblance of them, I should avoid her with the utmost aversion, and not follow her as I now do, with the highest delight. Oh! Belmont, she is quite angelic; every moment I behold her, I behold new beauties in her. ’Tis not to be imagined what enchantment dwells about her. And though I am with her for hours, and though I sometimes flatter myself that she looks kindly on me, I have not courage to learn my fate from her lovely lips. So fearful am I lest still, from a point of honour, from pure compassion, she should yield to my wishes, that I am half-distracted with doubts and apprehensions.’

‘ Come, come,’ said Belmont smiling, ‘ make haste and dress; let me go with you to see her, and I will soon tell you whether she feels love or pity for you.’

‘ Not for the world,’ said Sir William briskly. ‘ Besides, you thought, ‘ you know, that she loved me when ‘ you saw her at Mount Acres, and yet ‘ you was mistaken. You see, therefore ‘ that, with all your penetration, you may ‘ be easily deceived. And as I dare ‘ not trust my senses, and am resolved ‘ not to run the hazard of losing the ‘ blessing I at present enjoy in her ‘ most estimable friendship, I must ‘ learn to be content with that.’

‘ O rare platronics !’ cried Belmont laughing, ‘ I would give half my estate ‘ to have such a friendship with so delicious a woman—Well—good morning ‘ —but harkee, continued he, returning, harkee, Sir William, if you can ‘ make nothing of her, let me try—O ‘ G-d ! what would I give for such a ‘ divine friend ? — but remember — I ‘ must positively hear her sing. Adieu.’

Sir William, soon after Belmont left him, receiving some very fine venison from Mount Acres, sent it to his amiable

able Mrs. Beecher. She was just going to return her thanks for it; but, on recollection, thought that it would be more polite to invite him to dinner. She flew into Mrs. Romney's apartment. 'My dear friend, said she, Sir William 'is always so extremely obliging, than't 'I send to invite him to partake of his 'elegant present? His meals must be 'very lonely, as he is so good as to 'indulge me with your company.'

'Ay, my dear,' said Mrs. Romney, who saw the hurry of her spirits she was in, 'do.'

'I will write, I think,' replied she, 'and then.—No, a message will do; 'John is very exact. Yet I think, my 'dear Mrs. Romney, that it will be 'handsomer to write, lest John should 'make any mistake.'

She could not determine what to do—she sat down to write—she knew not what to say—she rose up again—she was irresolute—she wrote a card and trembled

led—it was blotted—she fretted, tore it, wrote another, and cried. ‘Sure, my dear friend, I am grown quite awkward.’

Though there was nothing particular in the card which Sophia sent to Sir William, he was transported at the reading of it. He almost devoured it, and flew to prepare for an interview with his adorable Sophia, who on this day left off her mourning, and had taken care to dress herself in pale purple ribbons, because he had told her formerly that they became her complexion. Her gown was a bright straw colour, her linen extremely elegant.

When he entered the room, a lovely blush overspread her face, and he never thought her so handsome. She thanked him for his present, and he launched out on the honour she did him by her invitation, in the most enraptured expressions. With a bewitching smile, and a little tremor in her voice, she told him that she was excessively glad it was in
her

her power to give him the least pleasure, in return for the many proofs which she already had received, and was still receiving, of his friendship.

By the beginning of her speech he was animated to frame a warmer answer to it than he had ever hitherto made; but the cool word which concluded it, checked him. It confirmed the opinion he had all along entertained, and convinced him that friendship, and nothing more, had regulated her late behaviour to him, and was the true source of her uncommon civility. It made him sigh, however; for though he allowed it to proceed entirely from friendship, he could have almost parted with his life, to have attributed it to a softer passion.

The reverie into which this poor word had thrown him, as it prevented him from answering Sophia, perplexed her. She had flattered herself, that if he really still loved her, he would have taken advantage of those little marks of satisfaction which she was continually shewing

him; and which, she imagined, would have been sufficient to assure him of the pleasure she received in his company, and to make him discover his sentiments to her. She looked abashed, serious, and disconcerted.

When Mrs. Romney came into the room, she found neither of the lovers in a very conversible humour. Their minds, indeed, were too much agitated to let them either talk or eat. She looked at them with a kind of surprise, and asked them separately, if they were not well.

Sir William, alarmed at this question, started. He fixed his eyes tenderly on Sophia at the delivery of it; and she, still more disturbed, for fear any thing should have indisposed him, as he was so serious, became uneasy, and repeated Mrs. Romney's question after her, in the softest accents, having observed that he had scarce tasted a bit at dinner. He answered that he was well, but in so irresolute a tone, that she did not believe him.

him. Her fears therefore increased, and deprived her of all appetite.

Mrs Romney, who no otherwise enjoyed their perplexity than as she thought it presaged a near approach to their mutual happiness, smiled at them, and was the only one who received any kind of satisfaction from the venison.

After dinner the servant brought in little Edward. Mrs. Beecher usually had him with her while his nurse dined, and had not that day forbid his coming. Sir William took him in his arms; and after he had played with him for some time, delivered him to his mother, who seemed desirous of playing with him in her turn, as she was excessively fond of him. Edward immediately clung round his mother's neck, and she pressing his face close to hers, gave him a thousand fond kisses. Sir William observing these endearments, eagerly caught the child in his arms again, and devoured the little innocent's cheek from which his lovely Sophia had just taken

her lips. She, engrossed by the pleasure which she received in beholding her sweet boy, overlooked this passionate action of Sir William's; but thinking it time to return her son to his nurse, took the child from his arms, and carried him out of the room.

The suddenness of Sophia's departure with her son, made Sir William apprehensive that his involuntary rapture had offended her, and he again became pensive and perplexed. Mrs. Romney, when she returned, told Sir William, to enliven him a little, that he had never, she believed, tried the harpsichord. Upon which Sophia said it would give her great pleasure to hear him play. He wanted no farther inducement, tho' he was never less musically inclined. But as all her slightest wishes were ever immediately complied with, he endeavoured to oblige her. She stood behind his chair, and expressed so much satisfaction at his performance, that it raised his before drooping spirits, and he at last assumed courage enough to ask her
to

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to sing; once more she would try, she said, but was afraid she should make nothing of it; and she was, indeed, so violently agitated, that she made several attempts before she could swell a note; and when she had recovered herself a little, sung in so timid a manner, with so tremulous a voice, that he, recollecting at the same time former situations, was almost too much affected to accompany her properly. She was quite ashamed, and shocked to fail, as she thought she did, in pleasing him whom she had been used to charm, and made, with an amiable diffidence, a number of apologies for performing so ill, assuring him, that if it would still give him pleasure to hear her, she would practise oftener, and recover her voice.

Sir William, almost over-come before with the alteration in her voice, which he entirely imputed to the illness she had had, and the present dejection of her spirits, though the softness and sweetness of it had still charms to throw him into ecstasies of delight, was again

totally lost in joy, at this obliging promise. Catching hold of her hand, scarce knowing what he did, he kissed it with transport, and cried, ‘Oh heavens! do you then doubt me still?’ adding he was as much struck with the melody of her voice, and the taste in her manner, as ever. This was happiness unexpected by Sophia; she blushed; she trembled; she did not know whether she ought to withdraw her hand, or to let him keep it. By the confusion she was in, and delicate uncertainty, he had a most desirable opportunity to detain it much longer than he would otherwise have done.

This little incident served to bring them into better hopes of each other; and they spent the rest of the evening in a kind of silent felicity, which discovered itself only now and then in their eyes; but the eloquence of their eyes wanted no assistance with their tongues, to render it more expressive.

When

When Sir William returned home that evening, he thought of nothing so much as how to make an excuse for going again the next morning. He could not bear the thoughts of staying from her till the afternoon, and he had not been invited again to dine.

After having formed and rejected a thousand schemes, he was determined to go earlier than he did before in the morning; and, if he was not asked to stay, to retire till the afternoon. When he arrived, Sophia, who had not rested very well any more than her lover, and who had risen early to practise at her harpsichord, at which she had been above two hours, was in the garden with Mrs. Romney, for whom she had been making a large nosegay, to put in her room.

Sir William ran to look for her, and found her sitting alone on one of the shady seats, in her morning dress, which was inexpressibly neat and elegant; her bosom was adorned with some very
beautiful

beautiful India pinks. She looked surprised at seeing him so early, but she looked also extremely well pleased with his presence. He sat down by her, and after he had for some time gazed on her with admiration: ‘I am afraid, said he, ‘Mrs. Beecher, that I am too early a ‘visitor.’ He was at a loss how to proceed, but beheld her with eyes, in which the most ardent love, together with a fearfulness of offending by having said too much, were plainly discoverable. She, whose eyes till then had been cast down, raised them to look on him with an encouraging smile, and told him that she was always extremely glad to see him; and that she hoped he would do her and Mrs. Romney the pleasure of dining with them. ‘’Tis a little ‘hard upon you, Sir William,’ added she, with a bewitching accent, ‘to deprive you for so long a time, of the ‘company of my dear and amiable ‘friend, but I am afraid I shall never ‘know how to part with her; and’——

Here

Here she was interrupted by doctor Wise, who had not been at Rose-Hill since the afternoon in which he so much alarmed Sir William, and called early, in order to be there before he came. As the servants had told him that their mistress was in the garden, he went down into it, without any ceremony, and found the lovely Mrs. Beecher, sitting in the manner above described, with Sir William hanging over her, as if he was admiring the flowers in her bosom, tho' in reality his eyes, his thoughts, were totally engaged by her person. One of his arms, rested on the back of the bench behind her; and upon her beginning to smile sweetly on him, and speak with extreme kindness, he took one of her hands, which he held in his. In this tender situation they were when the doctor approached. Sir William looked serious; Sophia, blushing, withdrew her hand.

Dr. Wise, after he had saluted Sir William, said to Mrs. Beecher, ' I took
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4 me,

‘ me, madam, of now and then calling,
‘ to enquire after your health. Though
‘ really my visit is not at all necessary
‘ at present; for since I have had the
‘ pleasure of knowing you, I never, I
‘ think, saw you look so well.’

‘ Yes,’ replied Sir William, his eyes
sparkling with pleasure, at the glowing
beauties of his Sophia, casting a look
at the same time at the doctor, to let
him know that his absence was more
desirable than his company, ‘ Mrs.
‘ Beecher, I hope, stands in no farther
‘ need of a physician at present.’

‘ I am very glad she does not, Sir
‘ William,’ said the doctor, with an arch
smile, ‘ I had much rather visit this
‘ lady in a friendly, than in a medical
‘ capacity.’

Sir William wished to tell him that
there was no occasion either for his
friendship or his physic, but not know-
ing how Sophia might be affected with
that

that freedom, he, out of respect to her, did violence to his inclination.

Mrs. Romney joining them, entered into chat with the doctor while he staid; and soon after he left them, Sophia went up to dress for the day, leaving Sir William in the garden till her return.

She was scarce a minute in changing her things; love gave alacrity to all her actions, and she was with him again long before he expected her. As she told him that she had been practising her music that morning, he asked her, after dinner, to sing: she complied immediately, and though her voice had not yet recovered all its strength, she sung with exquisite sweetness, execution, and ease.

Sir William hung over her enamoured; he was all ear, all transport and delight. Their tea interrupted them. He placed himself next to his Sophia, and discovered every moment fresh signs of love, and stronger marks of admiration.
She

She now began to think that he still was as fond of her as ever. This thought animated her to a high degree, and gave an unusual flow to her spirits. Stooping forward to reach something which she wanted, the little picture which he always wore about his neck, glistened upon the bosom of his shirt. She saw it directly; she saw it was the portrait of a woman, but as it returned to its place, when he resumed his former attitude, she could make no discovery of the person represented. She had, however, but seen too much: she changed colour; rose up in a hurry, and went into the garden to conceal her confusion; though she hardly knew whither she was going. A sight so unexpected, and which filled her with a thousand apprehensions, was too terrible to be supported by her with unconcern. She was sure that she had never sat for any picture, but the full length one, which Sir William had presented to Mrs Romney; and therefore she concluded that it was the portrait of another woman, with whom he had fallen in love during her

her marriage with Beecher; and to this new passion she, consequently, attributed the backwardness he discovered to revive a declaration of his love to her. She imputed every little appearance of gallantry in his carriage to her, to a natural propensity in him to that kind of behaviour to women in general, and conjectured, that from perceiving her love for him, which she had for some time been unable to hide, he had, out of mere gallantry, or perhaps pity, assumed a conduct proper for the occasion.

These tormenting thoughts, just when her passion for him was arrived at its height, just when she flattered herself that it would be amply returned, absolutely distracted her. She was not able to bear so cruel a disappointment: she sat down, almost without knowing it, on the very seat on which she had been so happy with him in the morning, and gave a full vent to her sighs and tears.

Sir William, who was entirely ignorant of being the cause of her abrupt departure,

parture, began to grow extremely anxious, when he found that she did not return. 'I am very much afraid, madam, said he, that Mrs. Beecher is 'taken suddenly ill.' With these words to his aunt, he immediately went in search of her.

He saw her as he came down the walk, sitting with her face covered by her handkerchief; and redoubling his pace, as he was on the rack of impatience, she lifted up her head at hearing somebody advance, and at the sight of him rose: she was hurrying into another walk, that she might, if possible, avoid him; but whether her inclination, or her strength refused to carry her, she made not haste enough. He came up to her before she was got far from the bench, and taking hold of her hand, asked with the tenderest air and most plaintive voice, the cause of her disorder, expressing at the same time, the extreme disquietude which it gave him. She drew back her hand in a hurry, in a manner she had never done, even at their
their

their very first acquaintance, and giving him a look which, she intended, should have discovered anger, tho' it really discovered nothing but vexation, said, with a faltering and hardly intelligible accent, that she was very ill, and desired him to leave her.

‘ Good G-d, cried he,’ alarmed and terrified, ‘ am I so unhappy as to see you
‘ again ill, just at the very moment that
‘ I had the greatest hopes of your recovery,
‘ very, your perfect recovery! What
‘ is the occasion of this sudden disorder?’ continued he, endeavouring to take her hand again, and pressing her to sit down on the bench. ‘ Stay one moment here, to rest yourself, my dear
‘ Mrs. Beecher’ He was going to substitute the beloved name of Sophia in its place, but fearful of being so free, checked himself when he had pronounced the first syllable of it.

This kind behaviour of Sir William’s redoubled all her tenderness, and multiplied her griefs. She strove to conquer
a weak-

a weakness for which she despised herself, and almost snatching her hand from him, and summoning all her fortitude, darted a look of so much indifference at him, that it nearly rivetted him to the earth. She then made the best of her way to the house, went up stairs, and shut herself in her own apartment.

Sir William, quite thunder-struck at her behaviour, the meaning of which he could not comprehend, returned also to the house, with an addition to his vexation, from his ignorance of the cause of it; though, as he walked along, he could not help assigning various reasons for this amazing and momentary alteration in her. At first he imagined that he had inadvertently said or done something to offend her; but as he could not recollect any thing, and as she had but just before received all his little tender officiousness with so much apparent satisfaction, he concluded that something particular had, at that instant, happened to revive the memory of Beecher, as nothing but the still most extravagant fondness for his
memory

memory could, he thought, affect her in that manner.

When he came into the parlour, pale, frightened, and dejected, Mrs. Romney immediately asked him what was the matter with him, and where Mrs. Beecher was?

‘ I hoped to have found her here,’ said he, with the most melancholy voice. ‘ She is in the greatest trouble at something, and flew from me, in spite of all my endeavours to detain her only for a moment: have you not seen her?’

‘ No,’ replied Mrs. Romney, ‘ I thought that you were together, and did not want my company.’

‘ I thought so too,’ said he, throwing himself into a chair; ‘ but all these flattering expectations are over: yet, for heaven’s sake, madam, go and see where she is; she is miserable, and I cannot bear to think of her being so.’
Mrs.

Mrs. Romney then went up to the door of Sophia's apartment, and found it fastened. It never had been so before, and she started at the opposition she met with. She knocked—'Who 'is there?' said Sophia, with a voice scarcely intelligible.

Mrs. Romney begged her to open the door, nay, insisted upon it; and thinking to gain her point by telling how anxiously alarmed Sir William was on her account, she replied, 'I am not 'well, and wish to take a little rest; 'I cannot come down again this evening.'

With this answer, for she could extort no other, Mrs. Romney returned to Sir William, almost as much disconcerted as himself. When he found that she, for whom his Sophia had ever had so great a friendship, with whom she had that very day declared that she did not know how to part, whom she had always trusted with all her secrets; when he found that she, his dear aunt, her dear friend, had

had been shut out, he was almost distracted with despair.

‘ Good heaven ! said he, to be so suddenly, at one blow, cast down, just when I thought myself at the summit of happiness !’

‘ Why really, said Mrs. Romney, I for some time imagined from Mrs. Beecher’s behaviour, that she was become as sensible of your love, as you can wish her to be.’

‘ I began to flatter myself that she was so too, said he ; and so flushed was I with these fond hopes, that I only waited for a favourable opportunity to ask her permission. Nay, I even thought that I had gained that this morning, when Dr. Wise, in an unlucky moment, arrived. Surely, surely—she cannot feel any thing for him ?’

‘ No, I dare say she does not,’ said Mrs. Romney ; ‘ he has not been here
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‘ since the afternoon in which you met
‘ him, and then his stay was very short;
‘ nor has she ever discovered more
‘ regard for him, than any-body would
‘ show for a physician of whose honesty
‘ and abilities they had an high
‘ opinion.’

‘ What can I have said or done then?’
cried Sir William; ‘ I never was so
‘ happy with her as on this day. She
‘ received me, as I thought, with her
‘ lovely eyes full of joy; and when I
‘ made an excuse for returning again so
‘ early, she said a thousand kind things:
‘ she scarce bestowed any time upon the
‘ alteration in her dress; she seemed to
‘ fly to me again with pleasure; and
‘ when I, unable to prevent my eager
‘ eyes from wandering over her whole
‘ person, her charming person, to spare
‘ her blushes, pretended to observe that
‘ she had, in changing her gown, parted
‘ with her nosegay, she smiled, and
‘ asked me to gather her another, of the
‘ flowers which I liked best to see her
‘ wear. Transported with this sweet
‘ privilege

' privilege of contributing to adorn her,
 ' I ran and plucked jasmines, which
 ' bore, I thought a happy resemblance
 ' to her own elegant neatness: and she
 ' suffered me to place them among her
 ' ribbons, as I sat leaning over her.
 ' Think, my dear aunt, imagine what
 ' rapture I felt in being so employed.
 ' I was almost delirious with joy, and
 ' had I not been too strongly affected
 ' by those marks of her esteem, I had
 ' then opened my heart to her. Would
 ' to heaven I had! And what would
 ' have been the consequence,' added he,
 with a deep sigh, ' but to be again re-
 ' jected, thrown from all hopes of hap-
 ' piness into the very depth of misery?
 ' I was easy while I enjoyed her friend-
 ' ship, her company, her charming con-
 ' versation; but to be torn from all at
 ' once in a moment, and to receive
 ' marks of the most cutting indifference
 ' —it is too much to support—But go up
 ' to her again, my dear aunt, you have
 ' perhaps undesignedly displeased her.
 ' But then she would not have shewn
 ' her resentment to me. No, so vile a

‘passion never could have entered so
‘sweet a bosom. Oh! go up, go up.’

Mrs. Romney went up. Sophia, hearing her through the door, begged her to let her take some rest, and told her she would speak to her in the morning.

As this was all she would say to her, and the evening began to advance, Mrs. Romney, who was really quite at a loss to account for so sudden, so strange an alteration in Sophia, and very unhappy in seeing the wretched condition of Sir William, fancied that something which had passed between them, when they were together, might have occasioned the change she observed in her, and persuaded Sir William to go home. ‘Perhaps, said she, Mrs. Beecher may be more explicit with me in your absence. I cannot, till I have seen her, and talked with her, give up the idea I have for some time entertained, that you are more dear to her than she is willing to own.’

‘Good

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‘ Good heavens, madam,’ said Sir William, ‘ why will you too contribute
‘ to feed me with hopes, false, false
‘ hopes? Oh G-d! could I but ra-
‘ tionally hope; were it possible at last
‘ to move her heart,’ cried he, all wild
with the bare thoughts of it; ‘ what
‘ would I not give? what would I not
‘ suffer?’

‘ Well, my dear Sir William,’ re-
plied Mrs. Romney, ‘ try to compose
‘ yourself, and encourage, as little as
‘ you can, either hopes or fears. For
‘ this one night trust your Sophia to
‘ me; go home, make yourself easy,
‘ and come again to-morrow morning.’

‘ My Sophia, cried he, Oh! would
‘ to heaven she was but so! As to
‘ making myself easy, that is impossible:
‘ I will go home, if you think it best,
‘ though I know not how to quit a place
‘ which contains all that I deem most
‘ precious. I go, madam, but my soul
‘ still hovers round this cruel angel: she
‘ is cruel now, you think so yourself;

‘ but yet I will not stir, if you do not
‘ promise to see her before you sleep.
She promised him, and he threw himself
into his chariot.

As soon as Sophia heard the carriage
driven from the door, though the sound
of it made her heart die within her,
she rang her bell, and ordered her ser-
vant to tell Mrs. Romney that she should
be glad to see her.

Mrs. Romney, with pleasure, obeyed
the summons. She found her pale,
with swelled eyes; so long had she been
crying. Sophia, though she had desired
to see that amiable lady, was very
much ashamed to look at her; but yet
could not bring herself to disguise her
sensations from so beloved a friend, who
had been used to know every secret of
her heart. Besides, she thought that
she had reason to complain a little of
Sir William’s treating her with un-
meaning gallantry; and to whom could
she, with more propriety complain, than
to her dear Mrs. Romney?

When

When Mrs. Romney asked her how she did, and what could have put her into this strange disorder: ‘I am far from well, replied she, but my mind is more indisposed than my body.’

She stopped here; she longed to speak about Sir William, but knew now how to begin. She blushed, and turned pale alternately. Mrs. Romney, seeing her confusion, pitied her. ‘Sir William, my dear Mrs. Beecher, cried she, is gone home in an agony of despair, at the situation he left you in.’

‘Sir William, madam,’ she replied, reddening with resentment, ‘only imposes upon you, when he pretends to have any regard for me.’

‘Imposes! that is a mighty likely story to be sure,’ said Mrs. Romney, who plainly saw how things went, and was determined to provoke her to discover her inclination for him. ‘How long has this idle notion tormented you, my dear?’

Poor Sophia, mortified to death, transferred her anger from her lover to her friend. ‘I don’t know, madam,’ said she, with all the spirit she was capable of assuming, ‘why you should entertain ‘so mean an opinion of me as to imagine that I can be tormented’——she repeated that word with a remarkable emphasis——‘about a man ‘who only dissembles an inclination ‘for me, in order to impose upon ‘my credulity with the greater success. ‘I should then,’ continued she warmly, ‘be guilty of a very great weakness ‘indeed.’

‘And can you,’ replied Mrs. Romney, ‘call a passion, for I will suppose ‘it something more than a bare inclination, due to Sir William’s long sufferings, and respectful assiduities, a ‘weakness, Mrs. Beecher? Have you ‘forgot all that he has done, all that ‘he has endured for you? Oh! ungrateful, insensible Sophia.’

These

These last words made all the intended impression on Mrs. Beecher, who, forgetting all her little anger, all her little pride, burst into a flood of tears, and said, her voice almost suffocated with her sighs. ‘ Oh! Mrs. Romney, ‘ do not call me either ungrateful or ‘ insensible. I feel, I feel but too much ‘ that I am neither. Would to heaven ‘ I was the latter, I should not then ‘ be thus miserable. But I cannot be ‘ blind; I must believe what I have ‘ seen.’

She could not go on: she was so entirely overpowered with love, shame, and sorrow, that Mrs. Romney felt for her, but resolved, however, at all events, to bring her to confession.

‘ Well, cried she, compose yourself, ‘ and tell me what you have seen to affect you in this manner?’

Sophia then, after a little hesitation, and a thousand blushes, seized Mrs. Romney by both hands, and looking
H 5 earnestly

earnestly in her face, with eyes in which all the passions she was struggling with were strongly painted: ‘Hear me, said she, my dear Mrs. Romney, my beloved friend; I will discover the inmost recesses of my heart to you; but first promise,’ added she, sighing and casting down her eyes, as if oppressed with shame to divulge her secrets, ‘that you will not betray me to Sir William; you will soon see the propriety of this request, don’t therefore refuse it.’

‘Well, my dear Mrs. Beecher,’ said Mrs. Romney, ‘if you deal ingenuously with me, you may depend upon my promising what you demand.’

Sophia then endeavoured to resume all her courage: with weeping eyes, and a languishing voice, she cried, ‘’Tis to no purpose, my dear Mrs. Romney, to tell you, for you have no doubt observed it but too well, that the renewal of Sir William’s acquaintance with me, after my return from Buxton,

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‘ton, gave me a pleasure which I could
‘not conceal. I had never, in all my
‘former connections with him, beheld
‘him with so much satisfaction, nor
‘ever listened to him with so much de-
‘light. The alteration in his person,
‘when I first saw him, pained me ex-
‘tremely, and I could not suppress my
‘uneasiness at the sight, because I ima-
‘gined that his unhappy attachment to
‘me had occasioned it. I thought I
‘could do no less than treat him with
‘all the consideration and esteem in my
‘power, for the sacrifice he had made
‘of love to honour: a sacrifice which,
‘according to all appearance, had nearly
‘proved fatal to him. This behaviour
‘from me he had, I thought, a right
‘to expect, on account of his own
‘merit, and of the regard which
‘my dear Mr. Beecher expressed for
‘him. And as he seemed thoroughly
‘satisfied with my behaviour, my plea-
‘sure increased; perpetually endeavour-
‘ing to oblige, I was perpetually oblig-
‘ed, and obliged in a manner,’ added
she, with a tender sigh, ‘so charming,

‘ that I became sensible of emotions,
‘ which would no longer suffer me to
‘ remain ignorant of their source. The
‘ sensations I now felt for Sir William
‘ were such as I had never felt before,
‘ and they were of the tenderest kind.
‘ I will confess to you, my dear Mrs.
‘ Romney, that after the first I gave myself
‘ no trouble to oppose a growing incli-
‘ nation, for which Sir William had, I
‘ fancied, so long sighed, and which, from
‘ the extreme delicacy of his carriage to
‘ me, he certainly so well deserved. I be-
‘ lieved that I was securely possessed of
‘ his heart, and that nothing but the
‘ respect with which he had ever treat-
‘ ed me, and a proper regard for the
‘ situation I was in, prevented him from
‘ coming to an explanation of his senti-
‘ ments. I gave myself up to the sweet
‘ satisfaction arising from the conscious-
‘ ness of being beloved in return. Every
‘ hour brought new joys with it ; every
‘ time I saw him I thought I saw ten-
‘ derness in his looks for me, and will
‘ own to you freely, that the greatest
‘ difficulty I laboured under, was in
‘ trying

‘ trying to conceal the delight which
‘ that discovery gave me, till I found
‘ a proper opportunity to reveal it.
‘ That happy moment approached. He
‘ never, in my opinion, appeared so
‘ amiable as he did on this day ; never
‘ seemed so pleased with me. Oh !
‘ madam, how can I describe what I
‘ then felt, how can I describe what I
‘ now feel, when I tell you that, in
‘ the midst of all his tender looks, at
‘ the very instant when I was receiving
‘ a thousand little endearing services
‘ from him, I discovered the picture of
‘ another woman, hanging at his bosom ?
‘ Oh ! Mrs. Romney’——

She doubled her exclamation, and Mrs. Romney, in spite of all the concern which she had felt for Sophia, in spite of all her anxiety upon Sir William’s account, burst into a loud laugh, and cried, ‘ Oh ! that ridiculous picture ! but I always told him it was
‘ the greatest weakness he was ever
‘ guilty of.’

At

At this unseasonable shout of laughter, and the answer which Mrs. Romney made to what she had been saying, Sophia felt herself offended, and said, ‘ I could not have imagined, madam, that after you had so earnestly desired me to open my heart to you, that you would have treated me with contempt. I am surely then fallen very low indeed by——

‘ Nay, now my dear Sophia,’ interrupted her friend, ‘ you are absolutely become as ridiculous as Sir William. Why, my dear child, that picture, which has given you so much uneasiness, is the picture of yourself; it was copied for him from the full-length one in the parlour at Windsor.’

It is impossible to describe the countenance and attitude of Sophia at this unexpected discovery. Her eyes glistened with joy, and lifting them up with her hands, with exultation, cried, ‘ Oh! my dear, dear friend, is it possible that I am still beloved by Sir William?’

Here

Here she stopped, and hung down her head; her face and neck were covered all over with blushes, which made them look as red as scarlet. Mrs. Romney loved and pitied her, and her heart felt so sincere a joy at knowing that her nephew would be rewarded to her wishes, for all his sufferings, as he so well deserved to be, that she took Sophia in her arms, and kissed her. ‘Thank heaven,’ said she, ‘my dear, you are at last become a reasonable woman. Be not afraid nor ashamed, of owning a passion for a man who so well merits your tenderest affection; and who is, at this very moment, tortured by the pangs of uncertainty and disappointed love.’

This speech alarmed all Sophia’s tenderness. She asked a thousand questions about his behaviour before he left the house; and when Mrs. Romney told her that he went away, calling her his cruel angel, she could no longer refrain from tears. ‘I have, indeed,’ said she, ‘treated him apparently with unkindness; but I will repair all to-morrow. Would I could

‘ I could now fly to him, and by giving
‘ ease to his heart, contribute to his en-
‘ joying that repose which I am afraid
‘ he is far from being able to think
‘ of.’

A tender sigh interrupted her; the recollection of all his passionate looks, and tender assiduities, which she had observed through the course of that day, threw her for a few moments into a delightful reverie. But recovering herself soon, she asked Mrs. Romney such a multitude of questions, that her friend began to be almost tired of answering them, and persuaded her to go to supper, and to rest.

‘ And do you think, my dear friend,’ said she, ‘ that I can take either rest or
‘ food, while poor Sir William is still
‘ unhappy on my account ?’

‘ Why, your forbearance, my dear,’ said Mrs. Romney, ‘ will do him not
‘ the least good; it will rather hurt
him,

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‘ him, as it will make you ill, and less
‘ able to receive him to-morrow.’

‘ I wish to-morrow was come,’ said
Sophia; ‘ never, never did I think the
‘ hours passed so slowly as at present.
‘ You cannot, surely, blame my impa-
‘ tience, madam,’ continued she, with a
timid air, ‘ for so earnestly wishing to
‘ relieve the anxiety of a heart which I
‘ have so many thousand reasons to va-
‘ lue?’

‘ No, my dear,’ said Mrs. Romney,
‘ I applaud you highly for it; but I
‘ shall now leave you to try to compose
‘ yourself a little.’

Sophia’s breast was so full of love,
joy, and anxiety, that she could take no
repose till just before her usual time of
rising. She then, her spirits being quite
exhausted, fell into a pleasing kind of
slumber.

Sir William, who returned home in a
situation of mind little short of distrac-
tion,

tion, spent the night in walking up and down his room, and endeavouring to assign a thousand different reasons for this change in his Sophia.

At a very early hour he dispatched a servant, with an enquiry after her health; and Mrs. Romney foreseeing such an enquiry, had given orders over night to Mrs. Beecher's servants, to say that she was much better, and would be glad to see him in the morning.

This answer revived him a little. He dressed and set out, almost as soon as the servant brought him the message. The rap at the door awaked Sophia; and she was astonished to find it so late. She rose in haste, and was hurrying on her cloaths while Sir William waited in the parlour, in the greatest surprize. He found he was come too early; he feared he had disturbed her, and earnestly asked for Mrs. Romney, that he might prevail on her again to try to make his peace with Mrs. Beecher for him; but she contrived not to be ready, on purpose,

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pose, till Sophia was, whom she followed
down stairs.

It will not be very easy to describe the appearance which Sophia made when she entered the parlour. She was in so much haste to go to her lover, that she had not given herself time to pin on her things with her usual exactness; and though they were extremely decent, there was nevertheless a charming disorder in them; an inviting negligence, to which her lovely hair did not a little contribute, a shining lock of which, entirely undesignedly, hung waving over her snowy forehead. Her cheeks flowed with the most lively blushes, and her eyes, which absolutely danced, expressed the most delightful transports, the most bewitching tenderness. She darted into the room; and in an instant Sir William, who had never seen, nor even imagined in his most rapturous moments any thing in the least equal to her, was struck, was dazzled with her figure. He advanced to meet her, trembling with emotion; and she held out her hand to him.

him. He took it, but, without letting it go, drew back. He surveyed her whole person with such ecstasy and astonishment, that he was deprived of all power of utterance. She saw his confusion; she saw his love. She sat down, and made a little apology for not being ready; but told him that, not being able to rest during the fore part of the night, she had fallen into a slumber just when she should have risen. He looked all amazement, and was stammering out an excuse for disturbing her so early, when Mrs. Romney, by an action of laughter, made him turn his eyes towards her; but they immediately returned to Sophia, who smiled, while her blushes increased.

Sir William knew not what to make of all this; at last he mustered up resolution enough to say, ‘There is, I believe, ladies, a secret between you; but as it seems rather to divert you, I hope there is nothing disagreeable in it.’

Mrs.

Mrs. Romney could then hold no longer. ‘The secret, my dear Sir William, said she, is, that this lady fancied last night, that you loved her no longer.’

‘Good heaven!’ said Sir William—He stopped. Sophia cast down her eyes, with a sweet but tender confusion, that was too intelligent to be mistaken by him.

‘Is it possible then, madam,’ said he, with the utmost eagerness, ‘that such a change in me, were I capable of it, could give you any disturbance?’

Sophia just raised her eyes, and giving him a look which spoke more than a thousand words, ‘You are much too amiable, Sir William, cried she, in the softest accents, for me to behold your indifference with composure.’

‘Indifference!’ said he, unable to explain, or indeed to collect the number of ideas which crowded upon his imagination

gination at this speech of Sophia's, who was so affected also, and so agitated by the sudden transition from pain to pleasure, and by the first confession which she had made of her inclination for him, that she could not utter a syllable. She fell back in her chair, as pale as death, motionless, and without sense.

Sir William, seeing her in this situation, shrieked. Mrs. Romney, who really began to be frightened, said to him, ' You must be very careful now ' in speaking to her, and consider on ' what you say to her. She loves you ' much too tenderly to bear any thing ' like neglect.'

Sir William, who was as much distracted with joy as he had been with grief, and alarmed at her situation beyond expression, scarce heard the latter part of his aunt's speech, but took Sophia in his arms; and while her head reclined upon his bosom, pressed her cold cheek to his, the tears of tenderness

ness falling at the same time from his moistened eyes.

This attitude, on recollection, roused her from the lethargy she had sunk into. She strove to withdraw herself from his arms; but he gently detained her, and with a voice almost suffocated with pleasure at her revival, at seeing her look on him with the most enchanting softness, ‘Do not, my angel, do not my
 ‘ lovely Sophia, said he, seek to deprive
 ‘ me of a blessing for which I have so
 ‘ long, so sincerely languished, for which
 ‘ I have so long sighed in vain. Oh!
 ‘ do not,’ added he, with a sigh which
 seemed to express every thing he was
 capable of feeling, ‘do not any longer
 ‘ refuse to my constant, my ardent pas-
 ‘ sion for you, the supreme satisfaction
 ‘ of hearing you confess your love, if
 ‘ you really feel any tender sensation in
 ‘ my favour’ (looking at her as if he
 still feared, as if he was still doubtful of
 his happiness) ‘if it is not yet all an il-
 ‘ lusion. Oh! make me blest enough
 ‘ to hear those dear lips pronounce my
 ‘ happiness.

‘happiness. I do not know,’ continued he, still sighing from excess of pleasure, while he beheld her languishing in his arms, ‘whether I have strength of
‘mind sufficient to bear so great a
‘change in my behalf; but as there is
‘nothing upon earth I ever so long, so
‘fervently wished, as to inspire that
‘lovely bosom with a passion equal to
‘that which fills my own; Oh! let
‘me, I conjure you, this once, be acquainted with my doom; for I cannot
‘any longer endure the agonies of suspense. If my wishes are granted, tell
‘me so, I beseech you; let me be acquainted with my happiness, though
‘I should die with joy at the hearing of
‘it.’

‘Talk not of dying, my dear Sir
‘William,’ said she, rising and gazing fondly on him, ‘have I not already suffered enough this night, in my fears for
‘you? and can you desire,’ continued she, softening her voice, ‘to tell you
‘that I love you at a time when I see
‘you

‘ you are incapable of supporting a discovery of so tender a kind ?’

‘ Oh, Sophia,’ cried he, taking hold of both her hands, and fixing his eyes upon her, as if he could have devoured every word she spoke, ‘ my dear Sophia, then you do love me ! That angel face of thine can never deceive.’

‘ I do,’ said she blushing, ‘ if that will complete your happiness ; I do love you to the utmost extent of your fondest wishes.’

This confession, made in so strong, so full a manner, with the most alluring softness, was indeed thoroughly satisfactory to Sir William ; but it over-powered him ; his colour changed : he let her hands drop from him, and cried, in a low, faltering voice, ‘ This is too much—I cannot speak to you—I cannot look at you.’ He turned from her, supported his head with his hand which leaned on the arm of his chair, and neither moved, nor attempted to

utter a word. The sudden unexpected transports flowed in upon him so powerfully, that they almost bereft him of his senses.

Poor Sophia began to be terrified at seeing him in this condition. She had never till that moment been so sensible that love had its pains as well as pleasures. She drew near him; she took the hand next to her, pressed it to her lips, called him her dear Sir William, and hung over him, while her eyes were bathed in the tears of affection.

It was some time before Sir William shewed any signs of recovering. She called for help to Mrs. Romney. At last, unable to bear her apprehensions, she burst into the most pathetic exclamations. ‘Why, Oh! why am I destined,’ said she, with uplifted hands, and streaming eyes, ‘to give nothing but sorrow to the only man in the world from whom I would avert it?’

‘Do

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‘ Do not, my dear, my beloved Sophia,’ replied Sir William, coming to himself, ‘ do not,’ cried he, catching hold of her again in his arms, and straining her to his beating bosom, ‘ accuse yourself of giving me pain; ‘ you have given me unutterable transport, which is so violent, that I am ‘ unable to bear the excess of it. But ‘ I am happy,’ added he, growing a little calm, and turning to Mrs. Romney; ‘ my Sophia, madam, has assured ‘ me that she loves me, and I am now ‘ completely happy.’

‘ I sincerely rejoice at it, dear Sir William,’ said Mrs. Romney; ‘ the ‘ more I have seen of you both lately, ‘ the more I think that you both deserve to be so, and can only give it to ‘ each other.’

‘ Oh! let me,’ cried he, ‘ be ever ‘ grateful, ever full of acknowledgements for the blessings I have received; and shew, by making my Sophia’s ‘ life as blest as mine is now, how

‘ much, how very much I have her
‘ happiness at heart. I will live, I will
‘ breathe only for her.’

Sophia, though charmed almost as much as her delighted lover, was afraid, after having seen the effects of her kindness on him, to give way to her own fond effusions, as she found that it was a long time before he could bring himself to be composed enough to hold a rational conversation; and though his irrationality and discomposure gave her the strongest proofs of his love, she felt a thousand fears for his health, for he was unable to attend to his breakfast, or indeed to any thing but her. He asked her with the greatest earnestness the cause of her flying from him in the garden. She blushed, failed, and said, ‘ Spare me a little, my good Sir William, I am so ashamed of myself—’

‘ Are you then, after all, ashamed of
‘ loving me, my angel?’ said he, looking somewhat seriously at her.

‘ No,

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‘ No, indeed,’ cried she, with a most winning sweetness, ‘ I glory in it, indeed I do ; but I am ashamed of being jealous—jealous of myself.’

As he could not comprehend the meaning of these words, she told him all her different feelings at the discovery of her picture ; but told them in a manner which gave him the highest satisfaction, without overwhelming him with joy. She was indeed obliged all that day to manage her tenderness for him with address, and to discover it only by little and little, just as she saw he could bear it. He would not suffer her to leave him scarce a moment. She asked his leave to go to dress before dinner. This request made him smile, but he smiled with the most exquisite delight.

‘ Only think, madam,’ said he to Mrs. Romney, ‘ of this sweet creature’s asking my leave to do any thing, when her influence is so absolute over me, that I have not for a great while had any will but her’s. Indeed, my

‘ Sophia,’ continued he, ‘ it is so little in
‘ the power of ornament to make any
‘ addition to thy lovely person, that I
‘ think it is loss of time to attempt it.
‘ I much question whether the most
‘ elegant fancied dress can shew your
‘ charms to the advantage to which
‘ they now appear. This simplicity of
‘ apparel, with the pretty confusion
‘ which attended it when I first met
‘ you this morning, almost ravished me
‘ with joy. But if you are resolved to
‘ go,’ continued he, seeing her make
a motion, ‘ be sure not to touch that
‘ killing lock of your hair; let me have
‘ the pleasure, too great to be expressed,
‘ of surveying that sweet face at your
‘ return, with the most alluring orna-
‘ ment that ever graced it.’ She smiled,
and left him.

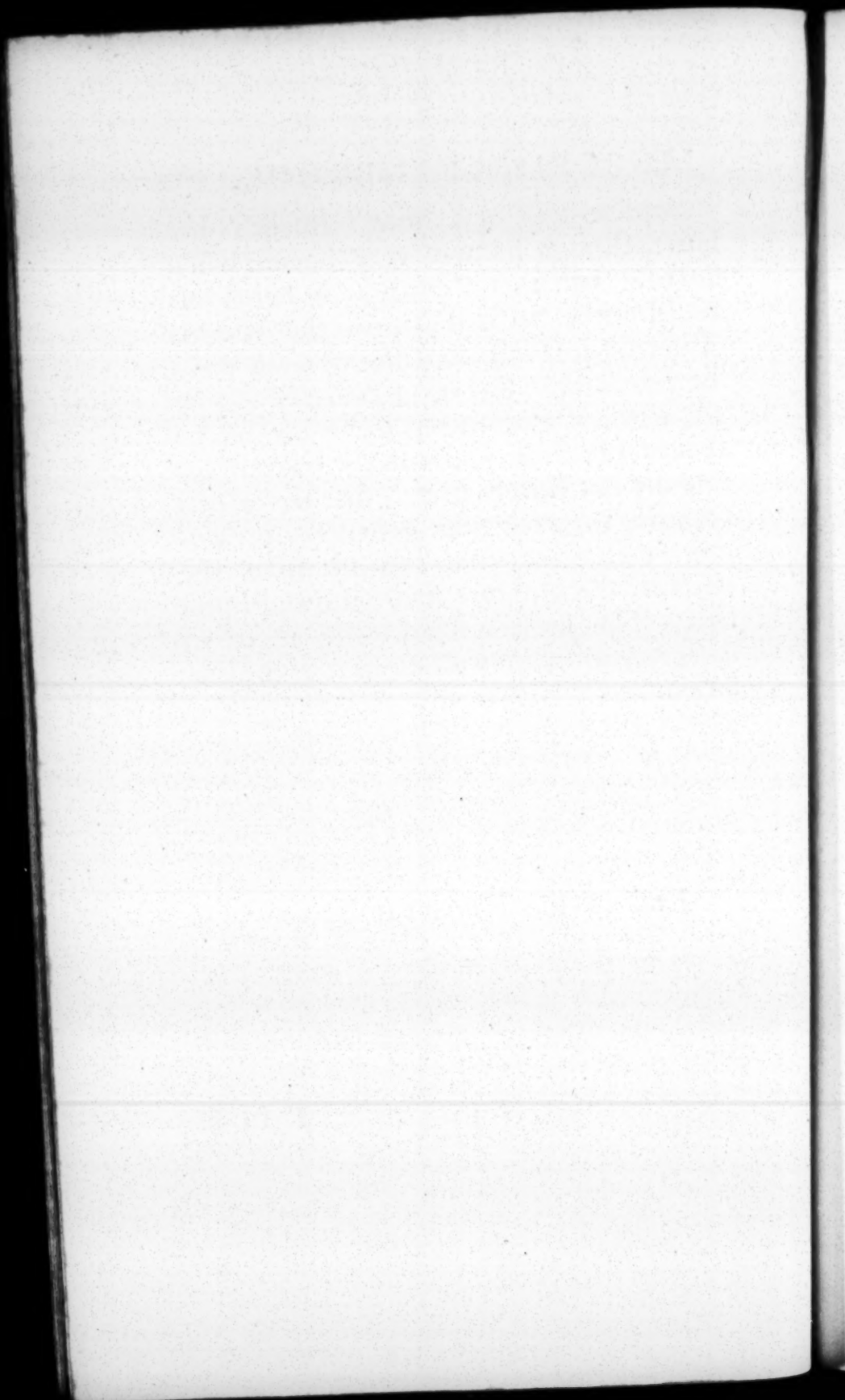
While Sophia was dressing, Sir William spent the time with his aunt, in throwing out raptures on the completion of his happiness, and the most high-flown panegyrics on the lovely cause of it.

Sophia

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Sophia was not long absent; her lover, though he was very sincere when he told her that a change in her dress could make no addition to the charms of her figure, retracted his opinion when she returned. She ever had the happy art, without attempting to be fine, to be always pleasing. Her dress was always elegant but simply neat. She never had recourse to what the generality of women call ornaments, to improve the charms which nature had bestowed upon her. The most refined taste appeared in her cloaths, as well as in her conversation.

End of the EIGHTH BOOK.



T H E
H I S T O R Y
O F

Miss SOPHIA FANBROOK.

B O O K IX.

SOPHIA came down to her lover in a different gown, with new, with unexpected graces; nor was that lock which had inspired so much admiration removed; it was only prevented from straying farther, and by

that means gave still additional attractions to her countenance. If women in general consulted their lovers, or those whom they wish to become so, they would make more conquests, and save a great deal of money at the same time; for many a heart has been won by an engaging simplicity, which has refused to yield to all the pride and pomp of dress. True love abhors all state, all ceremony; a load of finery throws a stiffness over the whole person, which rather distances than invites, and is more apt to excite disgust, than to inspire inclination.

Sir William received her with new transports. He gazed at her with still greater admiration, and could not be brought to think or speak of any thing but his Sophia.

When the hour of his departure arrived, he was very unwilling to leave her. He rose up to go, and sat down again several times. Sophia knew he had not closed his eyes the night before, and as she feared that the want of rest
would

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would injure his health, she begged him, in the tenderest accents, to have some pity for her, in return for her love to him, and not absolutely resolve to kill her by taking no care of himself.

He felt all the kindness of this little reproof, and tore himself from her, with the most evident reluctance.

When he returned to her the next morning, though it was early, she was ready, waiting in the parlour to receive him, and to while away the time, had been playing a lesson on her harpsichord before his arrival. She rose when he entered, and he flew with rapture to her arms. At any other time he would have intreated her to play on, but his whole soul was now too full of her, to attend to any thing else. He had a thousand tender questions to ask her; he longed to know every particular circumstance relating to her first feeling an inclination for him. This led to the pleasing recollection of a number of little incidents, which he had not pre-

sumed to reckon in his favour, till she so frankly confessed how much she had endured by endeavouring to conceal her regard for him.

If Sir William had been so much pleased with her before, when he was not able to inspire the slightest inclination; and when, after all he had done to shew his extravagant passion for her, she had been moved to nothing more than a friendly compassion for him, it is easy to imagine, but it is difficult to describe, the joy he now felt, on her declaring, without the least disguise, but with the greatest delicacy, the infinite delight which she took in his conversation. He was indeed charmed to so great a degree, that he wanted words to express his sensations. The sudden, the unexpected felicity he experienced the day before, almost deprived him of his senses; and though he did not lose the use of speech on this occasion, his replies were very unconnected, and indeed scarcely intelligible. He appeared to be in a delirium of joy; and when he began to be more composed,

said

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said over and over a thousand times, that he should doat on her to the last moment of his life; that though he had loved her to excess, from his first acquaintance with her, his present felicity exceeded his strongest conceptions, and that he only prayed to heaven to render it lasting.

He took the first opportunity that morning, to intreat her not to defer his happiness to any distant day. She smiled, and he was encouraged to go on; yet he was still fearful of proposing what was nearest to his heart. She saw his anxiety; she read his wishes in his eyes; his respectful timidity pleaded powerfully in his behalf. She permitted him to say all he thought proper on so delicate a subject. She heard him quite out, without interrupting him. When he stopped, and waited for her answer, with a beseeching look, in which there was a mixture of doubt and fear, she pitied him. ‘ Well, my dear Sir ‘ William,’ said she with an affectionate air, ‘ I allow all that you have urged to
‘ be

‘ be just; you have undoubtedly shewn
‘ great patience, and uncommon con-
‘ stancy; and I in return have no will
‘ but yours.’

‘ My angel, my Sophia,’ cried he
eagerly, ‘ every thing may be ready in
‘ a very short time: Shall next Tuesday
‘ be the happy day?’

She blushed, she threw down her
eyes, as if to consider a moment; then
lifting them up again, with a tender
smile, ‘ It shall,’ cried she, giving him
her hand; ‘ though it is very near, I
‘ will not retract what I have said.’

He seized her hand, which she held
out to him; he almost devoured it with
kisses; he folded her in his arms, and
discovered every moment fresh proofs
of the most violent passion for her.
When he grew calm, I must go to
London, said he, to-morrow morning,
and get every thing finished, which had
once been so nearly adjusted.

Her

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Her countenance immediately changed from gaiety to seriousness; she looked down, and asking him, in a plaintive voice, if he should make any stay in town?

‘ Stay, cried he, my love? What be
‘ absent from my Sophia? Could I
‘ live from thee now, my angel? No,
‘ you may be assured of the most speedy
‘ return, especially as I find my ami-
‘ able love so anxious about it.’

The rest of the day was spent in settling every thing for their marriage. Sophia wrote a line to her uncle and aunt Besfield, whom they agreed to invite, with Miss West, to be present at the ceremony which was to make them completely happy.

Mrs. Romney, their very sincere friend, was consulted in every thing. Mrs. Beecher thanked her many, many times, in the most affectionate terms, for the numerous acts of friendship which she had received from her, and
concluded,

concluded, with saying, ‘ I hope now, ‘ my dear Mrs. Romney, we shall never ‘ be parted again. I hope too, my ‘ dear Sir William, that we shall always ‘ have our dear aunt’s company.’ While she spoke these words, she looked at him as if she wished he would join with her in asking his aunt to live with them.

‘ Yes, my dear love, my life,’ said he, smiling fondly on her, and joining in her request with pleasure, ‘ I hope ‘ our aunt will not refuse us so great a ‘ satisfaction.’

Mrs. Romney expressed the just sense she had of their regard for her, and promised to go with them to Mount Acres.

Little Edward was then thought of, and Sir William obliged his Sophia to fix on the part of the house she most approved of for his apartment, as he was going to send down immediate orders to have it entirely prepared for their

‘ I shall enjoy no peace till I see you
‘ again.’

‘ ’Tis enough, my Sophia, my all
‘ that is dear and lovely,’ cried he, tenderly embracing her; ‘ thy fondest
‘ wishes go with me, and will hasten
‘ my return.’

Sir William, instead of going early to rest, according to his Sophia’s earnest request, spent a great part of the night in giving orders, and in putting up the jewels, which had been before brought home for her, together, that he might send them to her in the morning.

He set out as soon as the dawn appeared, leaving orders with John to be at Mrs. Beecher’s by the hour she generally rose, with the jewels sealed up, and a letter; and taking one of the other servants to attend him.

Sophia had been now so accustomed to see Sir William constantly, and so entirely happy in his company, that she
soon

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soon felt the approaches of infelicity in his absence. It gave her, however, no small pleasure to find, by the letter she received from him, with the packet above-mentioned, that he loved her as much as she could possibly desire. She ran into Mrs. Romney's room with it in her hand, and with new pleasure read it to her.

‘ My dearest SOPHIA,

‘ WERE it possible for me to paint
‘ the fresh transports of which I am
‘ every moment sensible, in the com-
‘ pany of my lovely charmer, she would
‘ be able to guess at the uneasiness that
‘ I endure in an absence of only a few
‘ hours: but words are too weak for
‘ that purpose; and to describe the ex-
‘ quisite delight which I now feel, on
‘ recollecting her kind looks, gentle
‘ speeches, melodious voice, and en-
‘ chanting conversation, no language is
‘ strong enough. Supremely happy in
‘ the possession of my dear Sophia's
‘ heart, I shall endeavour, with the most
‘ constant assiduity, to deserve it, as on
‘ the possession of it my future felicity
‘ entirely

‘ entirely depends. Such a heart is a
‘ treasure of inestimable value; and I
‘ am too well acquainted with its worth,
‘ not to make the preservation of it the
‘ principal and perpetual object of my
‘ attention. I am not vain enough to
‘ think that I merit the tender proofs
‘ you have given me of your sincere
‘ love and pure affection; but to merit
‘ them by the whole course of my fu-
‘ ture behaviour, will be my darling
‘ pleasure, and peculiar pride. My
‘ failings, I confess, are numerous, but
‘ by following your bright example, I
‘ hope they will be all eradicated. Af-
‘ ter all the anxiety which I have suf-
‘ fered in trying to gain your heart, I
‘ shall, you may be sure, redouble my
‘ endeavours to keep it.

‘ May every blessing attend an union
‘ so long sigh’d for on my part; and, I
‘ flatter myself, now equally desired by
‘ my dearest love.

‘ I fly, with the greatest satisfaction,
‘ for the first time, from you now, in
‘ order

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‘ order to return with the greatest expedition; to return to part no more;
‘ to spend every hour of my life in
‘ using my utmost endeavours to increase the happiness of my charming
‘ angel, and to render her sensible of
‘ the excessive felicity which she has
‘ conferred on her

‘ ever faithful,

‘ ever obedient,

‘ humble servant,

W. ACRES.’

‘ P. S. I have taken the liberty to
‘ send with this, what has long been my
‘ Sophia’s; every thing indeed, of which
‘ I seem to be posselt, is only in my
‘ keeping for her dear service, she being for ever the absolute mistress of
‘ me and mine.’

When Sophia had finished the letter and the postscript, Mrs. Romney, smiling at the pleasure which she discovered in reading it, intreated her to open the packet. The brilliancy and richness of
the

the jewels would have dazzled the eyes of half her sex, but Sophia had long been so very indifferent to all kind of vanity, that she hardly cast a look at them; but seeing among them the little picture-case, which was made purposely for her, she seized it eagerly, and as hastily opening it, discovered the portrait of her dear Sir William. ‘ See here, my good friend, cried she, how infinitely kind he is to send his dear resemblance to me. It will be some sort of comfort to me in his absence, and I will never part with it again.’

Mrs. Romney, who had not had much opportunity before to examine the jewels, as many of them had been sent home at a time when the looking at them only gave pain, admired particularly the form and fancy of the ear-rings and aigrette, and pointed out their several beauties to Sophia, who, instead of answering her friend, talked of her little picture, and told her that it was not handsome enough. ‘ There is not that agreeable smile about his mouth, said she, nor that
‘ that

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‘ that respectful, yet tender downcast of
‘ his eyes, which I so much admire.’

Mrs. Romney only replied with a loud laugh. ‘ Bless me,’ cried Sophia, blushing excessively, ‘ what have I said, ‘ my dear friend, that is so absurd? ‘ Well,’ continued she, looking not a little abashed, ‘ all people in love, I believe, appear mighty simple to those ‘ who are not : but if it is a folly, it is ‘ certainly one of the pleasantest follies ‘ in the world, and of which, while Sir ‘ William is kind, I never desire to be ‘ cured.’

When the hour of dinner approached, Mrs. Beecher sat down to it, without the least inclination to partake of it. She was beginning to reckon the time, and said, ‘ He will hardly, I believe, be back ‘ before it is dark.’ Scarce had she said so, when she saw his servant ride up to the door. She started from her chair, and turned pale. ‘ My dear ‘ Mrs. Romney, cried she, here is Sir ‘ William’s

‘ William’s man, I am afraid some accident has happened.’

‘ When will your doubts and fears be over, my dear?’ replied Mrs. Romney.

‘ Ah! he is come,’ said Sophia, all in a flutter of pleasure, ‘ he is come’—seeing the chariot drive up, and in an instant found herself in his arms. She was quite breathless with joy; she could only cry, Oh! welcome, welcome.

‘ My lovely angel,’ said he, transported at this reception, ‘ I am now come to be thine for ever; but,’ continued he, looking anxiously at her, ‘ you are pale, my life! Has any thing happened to disorder you?’

‘ Nothing,’ answered Mrs. Romney, ‘ but a million of fancies; one, while you would not come till after dark; and then, to be sure, some accident had detained you. She is, in truth, become quite your counterpart. Were

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‘ you to be separated again ; and were I
‘ to pass my time with the lady, I should
‘ be as much at a loss to know what
‘ to do with her, as I was puzzled about
‘ you, Sir William.’

‘ Is this true, my sweet girl ?’ said he,
fixing his eyes tenderly on her ; ‘ Am I
‘ really so exquisitely blest, as to be-
‘ come necessary to your peace ?’

‘ You are indeed,’ said she smiling ;
‘ and I am afraid that I have not a lit-
‘ tle teased my good Mrs. Romney
‘ about you to-day.’

‘ My dear, dear love, said he, how
‘ you every moment increase my happi-
‘ ness ! But yet, my Sophia, I cannot
‘ bear to see you look pale on my ac-
‘ count ; let me be ever then tenderly
‘ loved, but let my enchanting angel be
‘ ever well and happy.’

‘ Come, come,’ cried Mrs. Romney,
‘ let her eat her dinner then, and do
‘ you do the same. I declare positively,

‘ that I will hear no more raptures for
‘ an hour.’

They obeyed her, but smiled at each other; and though their tongues uttered nothing particular, they made a sufficient use of their eyes.

When every thing was taken away, Sophia thanked Sir William for his speedy and unexpected return, in terms that convinced him it gave her a great deal of pleasure. She thanked him also for his valuable present; but told him, that his letter and picture were indeed invaluable. Thus carested, thus adored by the woman for whom his soul had so ardently longed, on whom he more than ever doated, he found it no easy matter to express his feelings in adequate language, to discover the sense he had of his present felicity in proper terms. He was quite lost in pleasure.

He told her that the writings would come down the next day, and that her uncle and aunt Besfield had received him
with

with the highest marks of esteem ‘ Mrs.
‘ Besfield, my love, said he, has been
‘ so expeditious, that, while I was gone
‘ to my lawyer’s, she procured patterns
‘ of the silks and laces which you want-
‘ ed, and obliged me to fix upon those
‘ which I thought you would like best;
‘ and as I have studied my sweet girl’s
‘ taste, I hope, added he, smiling, that
‘ I have made a choice which will be
‘ agreeable to her. If not, they may
‘ do for the present; and your aunt, my
‘ life, may receive your own directions
‘ to send down others to you. Your
‘ jewels too I sent, as they were ready;
‘ but as the fashion has undoubtedly
‘ changed, during two years, they can
‘ be new set, whenever you please; and
‘ I will purchase some others for you to
‘ wear in the mean time.’

‘ No, indeed, said she, my dear Sir
‘ William, you must promise never to
‘ lay out any more in such expensive
‘ ornaments for me; they are suffi-
‘ ciently handsome for your wife to ap-
‘ pear in. As my only view in wearing
K 2 ‘ them

‘ them will be to do you honour, that
‘ uncertain thing fashion ought not to
‘ be so minutely attended to. The
‘ great value of the jewels themselves
‘ renders such an attention still less neces-
‘ sary : and, indeed, I have ever been of
‘ opinion, that a too strict adherence to
‘ fashion, has often spoiled a figure and
‘ a face, which would have otherwise
‘ made a very agreeable appearance. I
‘ am rather inclined to prefer those or-
‘ naments which are becoming, which
‘ suit my features and complexion, to
‘ those which are suitable to neither ;
‘ and have no notion of copying others
‘ servilely, in order to make myself look
‘ frightful, as too many women are apt
‘ to do, who are slaves to imitation.’

Sir William, still more charmed with her fine understanding, and the delicacy of her taste, than even with all her personal beauties, knew not how to set bounds to his admiration. He spent the few days preceding his marriage, in a state of felicity which nothing but that could increase.

On

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On the Monday his coach and six went to fetch Mr. and Mrs. Besfield, and Miss West, who brought every thing necessary for Mrs. Beecher upon that occasion. Sir William had asked his Sophia, if she had any desire to have the ceremony performed by any particular person; but as she left the choice of a clergyman entirely to himself, he fixed upon the curate of his own parish, a very worthy man, with a large family, and with but a small income; as he had some thoughts of giving him the living, when it became vacant by the death of the present incumbent, who was both old and infirm; and as he was desirous of making him known to his Sophia, that he might in that, as well as in every thing else, have her opinion.

On the morning appointed for this so-much-wished-for union, Mrs. Beecher was dressed in a most elegant white lustrous negligée, with silver sprigs. Her linen was the finest point; and she wore the necklace and ear-rings which Mrs. Acres had presented to her, and those

bracelets which had, at a particular time, given to Sir William so much uneasiness. The amiable graces of her person; the exquisite elegance of her taste, in the whole œconomy of her dress; the extreme modesty so conspicuous in every part of her deportment, and the beautiful blush which was spread over her features at the approach of Sir William, all together conspired to make her appear an object sufficiently desirable to apologize for the extravagant passion, if it could be deemed so, which he had so long retained for her; and which was now arrived to its height. He absolutely trembled with emotions of joy, when he beheld her that morning; and after the ceremony was over, which united them for ever, the first embrace he gave her was so particularly tender, and the manner of his pronouncing the word Wife so singularly emphatic, that he affected every body present with his behaviour.

Sophia, as soon as she was disengaged from the arms of her husband, flew to those of her beloved Mrs. Romney; and
it

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it is hard to say, whether the former or the latter received the most pleasure from the performance of those rites which made them relations: so affectionate on both sides were the expressions of satisfaction.

They dined at Rose-Hill, and about five o'clock set out for Mount Acres. Little Edward and his nurse preceded them in a post-chaise. Sir William and his Sophia were in a new post-chariot, and the rest of the company followed in his coach. They said but little to each other on the road; their hearts were too full; their joy only discovered itself by a tender silence, more significant than a thousand speeches. He asked her leave to draw off the glove from that hand which he held close to his bosom, and she consented. This was the only visible piece of gallantry during the journey.

When they arrived, he led her in, amidst all his standing attendants, whom, he told her aloud, were now all her's.

He seated her in the parlour, till the arrival of their friends; and ordered her son to be brought in; to welcome her home. He imagined that the pleasure which she would feel in seeing her little Edward safe and well, and receiving his innocent careffes, would amuse her thoughts, and make her for a while forget the fatigue of the day, which even to the most happy has something in it of constraint.

When her uncle and aunt Besfield came in, Sir William took his Sophia by the hand, and led her to salute them, and said, ‘ my dear, my amiable lady Acres, let me have the pleasure of assisting you in doing the honour of your house.

Mr. Besfield had been so charmed with the extreme tenderness and delicacy of Sir William’s behaviour to her all that day, that he ran out in the most violent praises of him, and concluded with saying, he was very happy in seeing that Sophia was become at last sensible of his great merit.

‘ I always

‘ I always told you, Sir,’ said Sir William, ‘ that lady Acres, by being left
 ‘ entirely free to act agreeably to her
 ‘ own refined sentiments, would more
 ‘ than double the obligations I owe her.
 ‘ She has this day so much increased
 my obligations to her, that I shall be
 ‘ never able to repay them.’

As soon as breakfast was over, the next morning Sophia flew to the apartment allotted for her dear little Edward. Sir William, whose passion seemed to increase every hour, and who could not bear her absence, followed her out of the parlour, and asked her leave to go with her to embrace his son. The fond caresses which he lavished on the amiable child, were not inferior to those which his amiable mother bestowed on him. Sophia seemed this morning to be particularly affected with the sight of her sweet boy; and holding him up to Sir William: ‘ I have given you,
 ‘ my dear child, said she, a father, whose
 ‘ extreme goodness to you, and whose
 ‘ affectionate care of you, will demand

‘ the sincerest returns of duty and of
‘ love : with a disposition to make those
‘ returns, I hope you will grow up
‘ every day, and every day more and
‘ more deserve his kind attention to
‘ you.’

Sir William was transported with the regard which she discovered for him, and amply repaid it all, by his excessive tenderness, by his continual assiduity, and by his unwearied sollicitude to please her.

Miss West beheld this uncommon behaviour in Sir William, with a gentle sigh, and a secret wish, which she was almost afraid to indulge, that it might be one day her lot to meet with such a man. She had, indeed, so far conquered her inclination for Sir William, as not to grieve at his total neglect of her, and his extravagant passion for her cousin. She even rejoiced at his felicity with Sophia, because she saw but too plainly that he could never be happy with any other woman : yet she could
not

not help thinking, now and then, that as she could have loved him as well as her cousin, nay, loved him much sooner than she did, she should not have been entirely unworthy of his regard.

Among the neighbouring families which came to pay their compliments, upon this joyful occasion, at Mount Acres, Belmont made a very early appearance. He sincerely congratulated his friend, because he found more and more reason to approve of his strong and tender attachment to lady Acres, the oftener he saw her. When he took leave of him, ‘ You are posselt of an ‘ angel, Sir William, said he ; I never ‘ envied a married man before.’

Sir William and his Sophia, on whom he doated to a greater degree than ever, were never so happy as when they were by themselves, or with their dear Mrs. Romney. Politeness, however, they thought, as well as friendship, required them to entertain their guests in the best manner they could.

They all went together to an assembly, at which almost the whole country used to meet every month. Belmont seized this opportunity to ask the favour of Sophia's hand once more. 'As the rules of public assemblies, madam,' said he, 'don't admit of your having the man whom you have chosen for life, for your partner, may I not hope for this happiness?'

Sophia, with great politeness, declined his request, by saying, that she had entirely given up dancing in public.

Sir William, ever close to her, heard her reply, and heard it with delight. Taking her by the hand, he softly said to her, 'My dearest love, will it not be agreeable to you to dance? If you chuse it, I will be still near you.'

'No, Sir William,' said she, smiling on him, 'I must beg to be excused: I never was very fond of dancing, and I have now lost all relish for it.'

'Charming

‘Charming angel!’ whispered he, in return, with a gentle pressure of her hand.

He absolutely idolized her for this very particular attention which she paid to him alone; and, in spite of the railery of Belmont (who laughed a little, though his mirth came not from the heart) declared, that he neither could, nor even wished to disguise his tenderest sentiments with regard to his affection for his wife. ‘It is an honour,’ said he, ‘to be united to a woman so distinguishedly amiable.’

Belmont, finding that all his eloquence could not gain lady Acres for a partner, danced with Miss West; and the next day called on them. Sir William first received him alone. The conversation was serious. Belmont declared, that if he could meet with such a woman as lady Acres, he would marry directly. ‘Miss West, said he, is very handsome, but she wants expression: she is not companionable; but she seems to have
‘a sweet

‘ a sweet disposition, and a great deal
‘ of modesty. She has a mild, agree-
‘ able carriage, and if I had never seen
‘ your Sophia, Sir William,’ continued
he, ‘ I should have perhaps been taken
‘ with her cousin ; but—I really am not
‘ sure that she has not done some exe-
‘ cution : her eyes are very fine ; could
‘ I see her separately from lady Acres,
‘ I might perhaps be touched : but
‘ there is such an animated sensibility in
‘ her, such a corrected spirit in her
‘ whole person and manner, that every
‘ woman near her looks absolutely life-
‘ less.—Apropos, you promised that I
‘ should hear her sing.’

Sir William smiled, and soon took an opportunity to introduce music. The organ, to which Sophia had been used to sing, had been removed to Mount Acres. He sat down to it, and asked her to try her voice, in a way which shewed that she would do him a favour by exerting it. She was all compliance ; she desired him to chuse a song for her.

She excelled herself in the performance of it.

Sir William found it difficult to keep down his transports. Belmont did not attempt to conceal those which he felt. He looked at Sir William, as much as to say, ‘ So far from exaggerating her ‘ musical merit, you have scarcely done ‘ her justice.’ She sung another song, still more in the *affettuoso* style. Sir William, quite enamoured with her, turned his eyes to Belmont, and saw him almost lost in ecstasy; he thought, therefore, that it was high time to stop. He rose up to reach a chair for his Sophia, while Belmont went up to her; and, in giving a loose to the sentiments which her voice had inspired him with, took hold of her hand; that hand which was so beautifully formed, and so delicately white. She instantly drew it back, and gave it to Sir William, who approached her, and who passionately kissed it. Belmont turned away, with a kind of smothered sigh, advanced towards Juliet, and asked her
if

if she sung like her lovely cousin. She blushed, and replied, that she had never learnt music. Belmont seemed to endeavour to attach himself to Miss West for the remainder of the time he staid. When he went home, Sophia's voice and person returned with double force to his imagination. He called himself a thousand fools for thinking about a woman who could never be any thing to him ; and wished that Juliet could be made to look and talk like Sophia.

Before he went to town for the winter, which he did in a few days, Belmont came again to Mount Acres, and asked for Sir William only. He talked to him much about Miss West ; said she would be a very fine girl, if she could be brought to have that enchanting sensibility, which was so very touching in lady Acres : but perhaps even she had not that attraction before she was in love. If one could inspire Juliet with any thing like that passion, those fine eyes of her's might, I fancy, be made
very

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very alluring. Has she ever loved any thing?

Sir William, without discovering what Mrs. Romney had once thought she felt for him, told Belmont that he believed she would not prove an insensible girl, if the right man made his addresses to her.

‘ Well, replied Belmont, let her copy
‘ your Sophia as closely as possible; and
‘ you may send a note, or a message,
‘ by me to her in town; but I will not
‘ see lady Acres; I will not trust myself
‘ with another song, till I have secured
‘ my heart against the syren.’ He then
left Sir William, and went to London,
without taking leave of the ladies.

Belmont had not passed unobserved by Juliet; she thought him the most agreeable man, next to Sir William, she had ever seen, and fancied she could like him as well, if he could like a woman well enough to behave to her as Sir William did to his Sophia.

Mr.

Mr. and Mrs. Besfield returned to London with their niece, with whom Belmont soon afterwards accidentally renewed his acquaintance. He had thought no more of her, after his conversation with Sir William about her. He saw her at the play, and the unexpected sight of her revived past occurrences.

Juliet, during her stay with her cousin, had little else to do but to make observations, and she made them. She caught a few of those graces which distinguished lady Acres from other women, and upon which she had heard Sir William expatiate with the most enamoured expressions. Belmont became pleased with the copy, as the original was not to be attained by him. He visited at Mr. Besfield's after the play-interview, and Juliet was soon very sensible of his little particularities to her; they affected her gentle bosom, which was now disengaged from every attachment.

Belmont,

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Belmont, when he thought that he discovered a partiality on her side in his favour, grew still more particular in his behaviour. She perceived his attentions with pleasure. In a reasonable time, when he believed that she wished for a more tender declaration of his sentiments, he declared them. They were received with that sort of timid confusion, which ever promises success. A few months brought them very near an union for ever.

While Belmont and Juliet were thus employed in town, Sir William and Sophia had almost made a paradise of Mount Acres to themselves, and to every creature around them. This affectionate and indulgent husband, at the first approach of winter, told his amiable wife, that if she preferred London, in that dull season of the year, or wished to be near her relations, he would immediately purchase a house in whatever part of the town she chose, and order it to be fitted up entirely according to her own taste. She replied, with expressions

expressions of the most lively gratitude, for this and every other endearing mark of his regard, that if he could be happy in the country, she should prefer Mount Acres, the seat of all her happiness, to every other place. ‘ But if
‘ the town, my dear Sir William, is
‘ more agreeable to you, it will certainly be so to me; when you are with
‘ me, no place can be otherwise.’

Sir William was charmed with her reply, because he saw it came from her heart; that amiable heart which was never so truly delighted, as when it was giving happiness to others.

Sophia, leaning on her dear Sir William’s arm, frequently walked out among their indigent neighbours; with her own eyes and ears, she saw and heard their distresses, and with her own hands relieved them. At their return from these little excursions he frequently clasped her to his fond bosom, with the most heart-felt satisfaction; telling her that she was actually an angel, by
having

having taught him the god-like disposition to promote the happiness of his fellow creatures. He made perpetual additions to the large sums he regularly paid to her for her private expences, the greatest part of which she appropriated to charitable uses. Want smiled at her approach; and the blessings of the poor followed her whenever she left them; for she in every shape relieved them, under the distresses with which they were afflicted.

As Sophia had chosen to make Mount Acres her constant place of residence, and thereby increased Sir William's felicity, who from the time he knew her, took no pleasure in his former acquaintance, they lived rather a retired life, considering Sir William's fortune; but it was a life of reason, and consequently of happiness.

Sir William, soon after his marriage, wrote a long and very friendly letter to Dr. Wise, inviting him to come, and make as long a stay as he could with him,

him, in which he desired his Sophia to join with him. He had told her before, that he should be glad, by any means, to make it worth the doctor's while to settle at no great distance from them; and when he made his visit, acquainted him with his wishes, declaring that he should ever regard him in the most friendly light, as he had more than once preserved what was infinitely dearer to him than his own life, the life of his Sophia.

In a short time this scheme was carried into execution. Dr. Wise took a house, a few miles nearer London than Sir William's, and found his account in it, in every respect. His skill, his obliging manners, and his agreeable talents, made his company very much solicited by all the genteel families round the country. Mount Acres was the place to which he made the most frequent visits. He was always particularly welcome there, especially when lady Acres became in a situation too interesting to suffer her ever affectionate, kind husband,

band, to be quite easy about her. He had, indeed, a thousand fears, a thousand tender anxieties for her health and safety; and knew no peace while there was the least apprehension of danger on her account. She saw his terrors; she felt for him, while she was charmed with his increasing tenderness for her; and she strove to alleviate his anxiety, by assuming a spirit of gaiety, which, though she had not hitherto discovered much of that disposition, because she had not, till since her marriage with Sir William, felt her mind so perfectly at easy, became her very well.

Sir William, always attentive to the least change in her, feared that she affected a gaiety of behaviour only to disguise some uneasy sensations, lest they should give him pain: but upon her repeated declarations, that she never had been so well, nor ever so happy; and upon Mrs. Romney's confirming what she declared, whom he privately consulted, he, in a great measure, re-assumed his tranquillity. Still, however,
he

he continued to watch over her, with a particular attention, and with the most tender sollicitude, that nothing might happen to discompose her. His regard for the little Edward, seemed also to increase, who, as he advanced in years, became more and more entertaining; and he always protested that he would never make any difference between him and his own children, if he had any, in his treatment of him. ‘Will they not be all my Sophia’s, he often said, and therefore equally dear to me?’

Sir William spent a great part of his time in walking about the country with his Sophia, when her health, and the weather would permit, in superintending his domestic affairs, observing the alterations in his garden, and improving his estate. These amusements without doors, sufficiently prevented their retired life from being wearisome. Sometimes they took airings in the coach or chariot. He intreated her not to think of riding on horseback, at least for the present; and she always complied

plied with his request. Within doors, their long and interesting conversations with each other, and with their dear Mrs. Romney, whom they would never permit to leave Mount Acres; music, reading, and drawing, employed their leisure hours agreeably, and excluded all complaints of the tediousness of time; complaints very frequently made by those who are in the greatest hurry to get rid of it. The company of Dr. Wise too served now and then to give a turn to their domestic chat; and to furnish lady Acres with entertaining materials towards carrying on the correspondence which she had opened with her uncle Besfield, at his request, when he took leave of her, as he was well acquainted with her epistolary talents.

Sir William was extremely pleased with the last-mentioned amusement, and told Sophia one day, that he should now have an opportunity to see the undisguised sentiments of her heart; the feelings of which she had perhaps, from excess of delicacy, never discovered but

upon paper. ‘ You and I then, my
‘ dear Sir William, said she, should have
‘ kept up a correspondence for some
‘ time; for I would willingly have you
‘ believe that I have never yet disco-
‘ vered my sensations to any one person
‘ yet, with so much frankness and truth
‘ as to you. And do you think I ever
‘ shall to any other? However,’ conti-
nued she laughing, ‘ you shall see all
‘ that I write to my uncle.’

He took her at her word. He used
to sit by her; to lean on her shoulder;
to admire all her little lively sallies of hu-
mour, and was penetrated sometimes
even to tears, with the affecting picture
which she drew of his tenderness for her,
and of her affectionate regard for him:
he frequently stopped her in the middle
of her work by taking her in his arms,
and giving her a thousand kisses, and
then (his eyes overflowing with love and
joy) bid her go and charm him thus
again.

As Mr. Besfield had, from time to time, given her an account of Belmont's progress with Juliet, when their marriage approached, they all joined in a request to have Sir William and his Sophia come to town, to be present at the ceremony. But they were too well satisfied with their own domestic happiness, to give it up even for so short a time; and the situation of lady Acres sufficiently apologized for her not leaving her own house.

Belmont, though he thought his wife handsome, was not displeased that all the world thought so too; and as he was perfectly easy about her conduct in public, as well as convinced of her entire attachment to him, he left her very much to her own management: under the protection of her aunts, and other ladies of her acquaintance, she frequented the fashionable diversions, while he amused himself with other young men of his own turn.

At the time when most people go out of town, that is, when the most delightful season for enjoying the country in its true beauty is over, Belmont carried his wife down to his house near his friend Sir William's. Lady Acres being just upon the recovery from her lying-in of a little Sophia, they made her the first visit. Though they were a fine, and what is generally called a mighty happy couple, the difference between them and the happy couple of Mount Acres, was too obvious to escape the penetrating eyes of Belmont, and the more tender ones of his wife.

Lady Acres, whose short confinement had given new delicacy to her complexion, which her elegant undress still improved, was sitting with her little daughter in her arms, on whom she cast the eyes of maternal tenderness; her young Edward was playing at her feet, Sir William, leaning on her chair, hung over her, like Milton's Adam, with
looks

looks of cordial love, enamoured. Mrs. Romney, at a small distance, with infinite delight, surveyed the amiable group.

Belmont started at so picturesque a sight, as if he was surprized at the unexpected beauty of the family-piece before him. Sir William (his eyes sparkling with joy at the recovery of his Sophia, and at the same time softened by the love which he felt increasing every moment for her, and her sweet infant) advanced to meet him, gave him joy upon his marriage, and demanded it in return for the restoration of his Sophia's health, even more than for the birth of his daughter. ' You will hereafter know, Belmont, said he, if you are not already sensible of the difference, how much the wife is dearer than the bride.'

Belmont only replied, by advancing to pay his congratulations to lady Acres, and to receive them from her; while
Juliet.

Juliet blushed at the excessive tenderness which Sir William still retained, still expressed for his Sophia.

If to wear fine cloaths, and rich jewels; if to enjoy all the pleasures of the gay world, and to have a lively pretty fellow for a husband, is to be happy, Juliet had no reason to quarrel with her matrimonial lot: for with such cloaths, jewels, and pleasures, with such a husband, she certainly figured. And if to be possessed of a beautiful young woman, who was admired by every body for her lovely person, and the decency of her carriage, is to be possessed of felicity, Belmont had equal reason to be contented with his choice.

The world, that is, all their fashionable friends, who judged only by outward appearances, and who were not a little disgusted at Sir William and his Sophia, for separating themselves from their gay circles, were often astonished at the preference they gave to a country life,

life, and wondered how they could shut themselves up together so long in a dull retirement ; or, indeed, how they could walk or ride out only with each other : they wondered too (the wonderers are very numerous) why they did not go to town in the winter ; and why they did not frequent their assembly in the summer.

‘ To what purpose is it,’ said the gay girls of their acquaintance, ‘ to have fine jewels, if no-body sees them? Lady Acres might as well have been Miss Fanbrook still, for aught we see.’ They had no notion of living such a stupid life for ever, not they. The mere young fellows, could scarce think it possible for a man so agreeable as Sir William, to give up all the pleasures of the town, with all the noisy joys of a rural life, to be always dangling after the same woman.

Belmont only, and a few others equal in understanding and sensibility, admired and approved of Sir William's exquisite taste: and Juliet, with here and there a girl of good sense, and a gentle disposition, thought Sophia the happiest of women, in so entirely possessing such a heart as she was mistress of.

The people in a middling station, who prudently enjoy the pleasures in their power, without running after those which are out of their reach, and with which, if they could obtain them, they would soon be satiated, never saw them together (and they rarely saw them asunder) but with the highest admiration. They beheld them with admiration, and always spoke of them with esteem. The poor, in general, blessed them, and prayed for them from morning to night; and their prayers were heard in every respect. In about a year after, Sophia presented to her husband a son and heir to his title and estate.

She

Miss SOPHIA FANBROOK. 225

She was the mother, and she was the nurse of her children, the supreme delight of her beloved Sir William, and of her dear Mrs. Romney, to whom she ever confessed that she was indebted for all the happiness which she enjoyed.

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